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Sweethearts and Friends

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Maxwell Gray

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SWEETHEARTS AND FRIENDS

SWEETHEARTS

AND

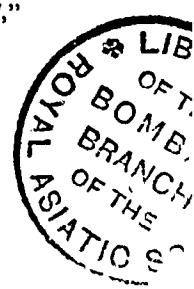
FRIENDS

A STORY OF THE
SEVENTIES

77910

By Maxwell Gray

Author of "The Silence of Dean Maitland,"
"The Last Sentence,"
&c., &c.



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"For is it a grief to you that I have part,
Being woman merely, in your male might and deeds
Done by main strength? Yet in my body is throned
As great a heart and in my spirit, O men,
I have not less of godlike . . . ."

ATALANTA in *Calydon*

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Sweethearts and Friends

CHAPTER I

"A being breathing thoughtful breath"

ONE of the most unpromising places for a pilgrim in search of the beautiful is Fulham Road; yet even that sordid spot is visited by the smiles of heaven, the holy looks of stars, the fairy pageant of cloudland. And facing westwards, a turn to the right from this dingy street offers a vista ending in a gray and graceful spire, supported by angels' outspread pinions, rising above green billows of trees. The spire, soft and aerial in the distance, is led up to by a perspective of houses, stuccoed and unlovely, but veiled and beautified by broken rows of light-foliaged trees suggesting woodland aisles.

Very quiet is the wide, forest-like thoroughfare

leading to the tree-girdled church in the square, where, instead of the rabbit's white whisking tail, the stray dog or the persecuted town cat darts across the path, or now and then a man in a polished top hat, a pair of ladies in dainty shoes pass along the pavement, or an occasional carriage rolls by. In Angel Road, half-way between Fulham Road and the tree-embowered church, is a house in whose inmates the reader is requested to take a special interest out of pure courtesy. This house is number nine.

One mellow golden afternoon in October, a time when the southing sun, as if relenting in the moment of his departure, turns a lingering, loving gaze backwards, the sunshine lay warm on pavement, housetop and spire, wrapping the thin-leaved limes in golden lustre; masses of cumulous clouds rose like celestial Alps on a pale sky, their opalescent tints brightening to rose at the summits and shading imperceptibly into gray beneath their aerial bases. The golden lustre poured into number nine through a back drawing-room window, framed and half hidden by a Virginian creeper burning in autumn glory.

Some acacias stood in shadow, delicate and immovable in the still air, before the front windows. In this room tea was being taken by several ladies fatigued by shopping, one of whom, Mrs. Langton, was looking at a roll of shining silk that her daughter held before her critical gaze. She was the mistress of the house and mother of many daughters.

"It is too cheap. It looks well enough in this light, but hold it before the window. It won't wear," she said.

"Well," replied Georgie, "who wants it to wear? In six months it will be as antiquated as if it had come out of the ark."

"I agree with Georgie," said a girl visitor. "I found thirteen old-fashioned costumes of mine in a closet yesterday, all new since the spring. Now what is one to do with thirteen costumes as good as new? I don't like to burn them *all*."

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Langton, "why when I was a girl—and we had almost as much pin-money then as I have for house-keeping now—a dress lasted us, a good silk, two or three

years. My daughters make their own dresses, else we could not manage."

"We like dressmaking," Georgie said, "all but Amy; she hates it."

"Poor dear Amy is such a trial," lamented her mother.

"A temper?" asked Mrs. Marshall. "A little mannish?"

"No; she is always thinking, and wanting to do something."

"Girls never talked of doing things in my day," Mrs. Marshall said; "they did them."

"I used to want girls because I thought they would give no trouble. But now——" An expressive silence veiled Mrs. Langton's grief.

"You will soon be out of your trouble," said Mrs. Marshall cheerfully. "In a couple of years they will all be married. Come, Nettie, we have another call to make. Love to naughty Amy. Good-bye."

"If Amy would but give up thinking," said her mother, examining a letter brought in response to the postman's knock, and addressed in a firm masculine hand to Miss Amy Langton. "What

good can possibly come to a girl who thinks? We never thought of thinking when I was young."

"But mother dear, people were not in earnest then," said Grace, "the Church was only just awakening from her long sleep."

"I wish it had never waked," replied Mrs. Langton. "People did well enough when it was asleep. No one had any doubts then, except of course a few Atheists; there were no good infidels then; it is more consistent of infidels to be wicked. And people were not ashamed of being comfortable in church. One was not expected to be jostled in one's pew by the common people, and it was not thought so difficult to get to heaven. This thinking turns everything upside down."

"But, mamma, the Church——"

"My dear Grace, I wish you would read your Bible, mend your things, and keep up your accomplishments, instead of talking of churches and wanting to do things. No dears, the writing is not a man's, though masculine. Your sister has no male correspondents. Where *can* Amy be?"

Naughty Amy was safe in solitude of the room she shared with Georgie, the sister who had least in common with her, reading a big book illustrated by diagrams of the human form, and making notes in a manuscript volume. Hearing her own name, and Georgie's light step on the stair, she grasped ink-bottle and notebook in one hand, the big volume in the other, and fled into a closet, in which dresses hung; there she remained until Georgie had satisfied herself that the room was empty, when she emerged from her hiding place, looked and listened for a few minutes, stole to the bedroom door, closed it softly, and sat down again to her book and notes. But ink bottles cannot be carried wrong side upwards with impunity; this one had discharged its contents in a black, sinuous course over notes, books, and Amy's dress, and thence, in a thin dotted line, to the closet door and back again to the table by the window.

"And such a nice clear time before me, and I might have got hold of Julius's skeleton!" she sighed, trying to sponge away the ink stains, in the midst of which labours came a knock at

the door, followed by Grace with the thick letter.

"My dear Amy! what will mamma say? Another ink bottle upset?"

"What can I do, Grace?" she replied. "I can only read when I hide. Why waste my life helping others to waste theirs?"

"Poor little silly! I have brought you a letter, but I am afraid the letter must wait till after dinner to be read, unless the boys should be late," Grace said gently. "You will scarcely be ready in time. Get ready, dear, I will manage the ink."

The boys were not late; when the sisters went down to the drawing-room, Amy with the thick letter in her hand, they found Cecil and Julius standing on the hearthrug and a stranger sitting on the end of a couch by Mrs. Langton. Cecil was a tall, fair, handsome man of four-and-twenty, a clerk in a Government office, with a conviction that the universe should have been planned for his especial benefit; Julius a merry-faced lad of twenty-one, a medical student, with none.

"My dears," said Mrs. Langton, as the

stranger rose on their entrance, "You remember Mr. Lester, Vivian Lester, at Baron's Cleeve?"

They remembered him very well. "The Immaculate Lester" was one name by which this young man was known to the family, "That beastly prig" another. Slim, knightly looking, with large, melancholy dark eyes, more manner than is usual, and a face not devoid of intelligence, the Immaculate, with all his virtues, was seldom disliked even by his own sex. An only child, early left an orphan, and now at twenty-four his own master, and that of a small estate near Baron's Cleeve, Vivian Lester, of Croft Hall and the Middle Temple, was an eminently desirable acquaintance for a family of daughters.

"I remember Mr. Lester as a boy on a pony at Baron's Cleeve?" Georgie replied. "Amy was then only a dot in pinafores."

Turning to Amy, Lester saw an awkward, shy girl, whose tumbled dress looked as if it had been pitchforked on to her shoulders, with red, though well-formed hands, and hair that seemed as if a touch would bring it down; she had beautiful

eyes of the deepest blue with long curling lashes, a firm pure tint, resolute lips, and the white even teeth of amiability and health. The face should have pleased, but it was not the style of countenance the Immaculate admired. It had a want of finish and repose, a look of expectancy and eager intelligence, that he thought unbecoming in a woman. The Immaculate's views on women were immense.

Georgie was a lovely girl, with gold hair, light blue eyes, slight, rounded figure, and graceful manner. Amy thought to read Lester's character at a glance. "A manly man," she decided, "handsome, simple-hearted and intelligent, but he evidently looks down upon me." This was unjust; every feminine creature, even when erring, was to Lester an object of veneration.

At dinner, Lester, who liked ladies to dine on air and sentiment, was surprised to hear Cecil say, when carving, "Give that to Miss Amy, there is too much for any one else," and horrified to see that she took it with philosophic calm, and dispatched it without emotion, until Cecil laughed. "Well, Amy," he said, "I really thought that

even you would have been staggered by that." Then she turned crimson and hung her head.

"You ought to be proud of her appetite," Julius said. "It indicates health; besides she's growing. Don't mind him, my dear girl; take some more beef; it will do you good."

"My dear," Mrs. Langton began to Amy with a view to changing the subject, "I was so sorry that you were out this afternoon when the Marshalls called. Such delightful people!"

"I was not out, mother," replied Amy.

"Not out? then where were you?"

Georgie laughed. "The little puss was hiding in the closet, ink and all," she said.

"I am distressed, Amy," said Mrs. Langton in a low tone and fluttering her cap strings with vexation. "That you will not see people is bad enough, but when it comes to deception——"

"Mother, it was no deception. If Georgie had found me I should have been obliged to see the Marshalls, as it was, I avoided them without rudeness."

The Immaculate, though much interested in Grace's conversation with Cecil and himself,

overheard this, and it made him very, very sad.

When the ladies reached the drawing-room, Amy put herself in a remote corner, lighting a taper on a table near, and read the long delayed letter, which ran thus:—

"Windermere, Oct., 187—.

"My darling Amy,—I have the most wonderful piece of news for you. You remember my poor grandfather's death? Well, the poor dear old man relented, and left us—Lucius and me—each £10,000. You can guess what is going to happen now that I am free. Of course I shall carry out my long-cherished plan of studying medicine. Miss Sterne, as might have been predicted, cannot imagine how I can renounce my "beautiful calling" of teaching girls to do nothing and shut their eyes to the realities of life. Still, I do renounce the only profession open to women till quite recently. I must remain here till the Christmas holidays, when I shall go to town and study at the new school of medicine for women. I shall live in apartments near. Till when——"

Amy looked up on the entrance of her brothers

and the Immaculate, and put her half-read letter once more in her pocket, her mind full of her friend's good fortune and audacity, when an idea suddenly flushed her face crimson. Why not follow her friend's example? She had been studying anatomy with a view to making her geological studies more complete, also chemistry and physiology. Why not turn these studies to practical account and become a useful member of society? Why not cut the Gordian knot by leaving that house of many daughters, in which she was an anomaly and superfluity? She was so engrossed by these reflections that she did not observe the Immaculate standing patiently before her with a cup of tea.

"Oh, I beg pardon," she exclaimed, starting from her dreams, "but such a splendid idea has just come into my head."

"Can you sweeten your tea with ideas?" he asked. "That a girl should be so brusque," he thought.

"I could with this, it is so very sweet; but I don't like sweet tea, thanks." She looked so bright and full of pleasure that he was interested,

and took a seat by her. Perhaps the blue-stocking was only an affectation; she was young.

"I wonder if you could sweeten my tea with some of that superabundant sweetness, Miss Amy," he asked, looking as beautiful as the day, while Georgie played a waltz on the piano.

"I wish I could, but perhaps you know that one man's meat is another man's poison."

"Still, some human beings have meats in common."

"I am afraid," she thought, "that you and I are not those human beings. Oh, I say!" she cried, starting at a sudden thumping and struggling at the door. "Good gracious!" "By Jove!" cried her brothers, "What has the creature got?"

Georgie's music was silenced, the door burst open and a large retriever puppy belonging to Julius rushed in, rolling something between his forepaws heavily over the floor.

"Down, Jack, down," cried Cecil. "Drop it, sir, drop it."

A kind of bowl rolled to Cecil's feet. He picked it up with a suppressed smile and held it aloft. Amy ran forward and took it eagerly, crying in a

tone partly injured, partly satisfied, "Why it's my skull! I can't think how the dog got it," she added. "I put it under my pillow myself."

"I tell you what, Amy," said Cecil angrily, "if this thing turns up any more, I'll smash it to atoms."

The Immaculate was overcome. Was this girl a Valkyr? he asked himself, as he listened to a discussion of Amy's anatomical studies with a shocked face.

"I say, Amy," said Julius, who had returned from tying up the retriever, "It's time you stowed all that nonsense of learning anatomy. As if a girl could learn anatomy."

"Why not?" she demanded, on her mettle. "I know a girl who wrote an anatomical paper for a science journal."

"Some old hag in spectacles cribbed it all out of a book."

"Twenty-four and with pretty eyes. She's coming to town to study to be a surgeon at Christmas."

"She may study," replied Julius. "There's not a professor at St. Scalpel's who hasn't sworn

to give up his place before he will examine a woman."

"Amy," said Mrs. Langton, "where did you pick up this dreadful person?"

"Mother, it is Louisa Stanley."

"That English governess who has been the ruin of you?"

"She is my best friend. I like her better than anybody in the world," cried Amy.

The Immaculate was more and more shocked; he wished to turn the subject. "Have you seen Mr. Tennyson's new drama, Mrs. Langton?" he asked mournfully.

Of course she had. A discussion on the poet arose, in which Julius said with acerbity, "Fancy Elaine walking the hospitals!"

"Of course she would have fainted at the sight of a wounded man," returned Amy scornfully.

"N-no; she would not have fainted," said Lester, with confusion.

He was looking at an engraving in the illustrated Idylls of the King, representing Elaine extracting the spear from Lancelot's side. "Yes, it is a nice picture," Amy said. "Lancelot

looks so grateful. They were used to women doctors in those days."

"Rude savage times," said the Immaculate crossly, to Amy's enjoyment.

"Still the times of chivalry; of the apotheosis of woman," Grace added. "Ah! If the days of chivalry were not gone by!"

"They are not gone by," replied the Immaculate vigorously. "They will never go by, while——"

"Don Quixote Lester is alive and kicking," Julius put in.

The Immaculate smiled mournfully. He never resented chaff, and was capable of laughing at himself, so that his virtues were endurable.

"Ah, but chivalry *is* gone by, Julius," Amy said. "Sir Philip Sidney is scarcely ever seen riding in the parks now; Una never walks in Kensington Gardens with her milk-white lamb——"

"And 'the gentle lady wedded to the Moor' is too busy studying anatomy to listen to Othello's stirring tales," added Lester.

"Hear! hear!" cried Cecil. "Look here, Lester, you know what everybody ought to be and do. Let us have your ideal of a woman."

"Drive on, old chap," added Julius. "A being——"

"With a big B," Georgie put in, "and no views——"

"Miss Grace will tell us," said the Immaculate with his accustomed gallantry. "Those who live ideals can best paint them."

"Mr. Lester!" cried Grace, crimson, "How can you? I can't!"

"Well," began Lester,—"The—ideal—h'm!—woman is—ah!—a being—whose weakness is her strength, in whom—ah!—feeling replaces intellect, meekness and refinement strength, who—should be a rest to her husband by her freedom from toil, a strength to him by the appeal of her weakness, a joy to him by her freedom from sorrow."

"And have no relations, no pity, and ten thousand a year," added Amy with a derisive laugh, echoed by Georgie.

"And only speak when she's spoken to," added Cecil severely. "Well done, Lester!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lester," said Mrs. Langton; "nothing can be more just or desirable than the picture you have drawn of an ideal woman."

CHAPTER II

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place,
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

WHEN Amy Langton at the age of eighteen left White How, a great rambling house over beautiful Windermere, she was supposed to have completed her education at that finishing school. But she thought that, like that of her brothers at the same age, her real education was just about to begin. She had been very happy in the bare bleak house on the hill, looking across the clear brown lake, with its lovely Belle Isle, that was russet brown in winter, of every tender and soft colour in spring, green in summer, rich and varied in autumn, reflected in the lucid wave. The windows of White How had views of brown and purple wooded hills, rising above

waterside meadows, of the bare jagged peaks of Langdale Pikes, and the dim mountainous lake-head at Ambleside; westward they showed the lake winding away like a broad river among the mountains.

There, her nerves braced by exhilarating mountain air, her spirit fed by the stern and lofty beauty of fell and lake, body and mind developed, the former growing tall, agile, clear-skinned and bright-eyed, the latter eager, acute, and avid of ideas; there she consumed with equal readiness and satisfaction the hearty north-country fare furnished for these girls in the early seventies, and such intellectual food as was attainable as well. Holidays at White How were spent in rowing in long out-riggers on the lake, wandering through wild rocky woods, over craggy fells, by becks and waterfalls.

A joy to those who taught what she thought worth teaching, Amy Langton was a trial to the music-master. She flatly refused to practise, saying she had wasted time enough on an art for which she had neither talent nor desire, till at last the wearied man requested that she might no

longer attend his lessons. But she was a joy to the pastry cook, whom the girls visited on Saturdays, and to her school-fellows, being always in good health, good spirits and temper, and ready to help lazy girls.

Still, Miss Amy Langton was not a model pupil, though so quick and teachable in class; she was always breaking rules and crockery, upsetting ink, gravity, and teachers' tempers. There were many rules, mostly petty, always irritating. It was forbidden to walk in the carriage drive, to linger by the front terrace walls, to walk arm-in-arm, to run through hall and corridor, to speak to a servant; to go out alone was never dreamt of. There was not a rule unbroken by Amy Langton; some rules had to be invented expressly to curb this lively damsel's exuberant spirits.

One Saturday in May, a time so delicious in the Lake country, when the foliage presents its greatest variety, the school rowed across the lake and moored their boats on the opposite shore, where they dispersed in the woods to find lilies of the valley and other flowers. Miss Sterne, who had nearly accomplished the years allotted to

man, accompanied her pupils on water expeditions, so that if they went to the bottom she might escape the reproaches of bereaved parents. Comfortably seated on a camp-stool in a shady nook, the head of the school enjoyed the exquisite prospect before her, the lake shining in sun, purpling mountains reflected in its still surface, whispering leaves overhead—and envied the young lovers drifting past in a pair-oared skiff. At seventy single blessedness has drawbacks. The young English governess withdrew into a little cove beneath some rocks by the water-side, and listened to the waves' tiny wash over the pebbles at her feet. The girls' light dresses fluttering in and out of the trees were just visible to her, their clear voices calling one to another, just audible. Mademoïselle was on guard by the shore; Miss Sterne watched above; all was safe; she opened a book and was lost in it till a quick step sounded over the pebbles, and a voice cried, "Miss Stanley!" Fatal, too frequent appellation! Governesses soon learn to hate their own names. Miss Stanley looked up at the lanky figure of a girl of barely seven-

teen, standing shy and awkward before her.

"You gave me back my English composition last night," the girl said, colouring deeply and speaking abruptly.

Miss Stanley's delicate face showed impatience repressed, her brows were knitted, her mouth compressed. "Yes, Amy, I gave you a Very Good. It is the best composition you ever sent in."

"Thank you. But — there — was — this —" holding out a paper, "in it folded up—and, before I knew, I had read half—then somehow I was obliged to go on to the end."

Amy's cheeks grew redder and redder; Louisa took the paper, and, having glanced at it, laughed.

"Never mind," she said, "It is nothing personal. For pity's sake don't cry. It is only a translation. Come and sit by me. Let us talk of something else."

The girl looked up through tears at the clever young face and wistful eyes with sudden interest. "How clever and kind you are! " she cried; "How did you learn Greek? "

When she heard that it was done by grammars and lexicons without other help, she threw herself, like a long-legged boy, on the mossy ground before Louisa with a great "Oh!" of wonder and admiration.

"Let *me* learn Greek, Miss Stanley. We learn in school such an awful lot of humbug. Greek is not humbug."

"You shall learn Greek; I will teach you—at least what I know. But we shall have to get up before the bell these bright mornings."

"It's a shame to take advantage of you; you have such a lot to do. You seem to know everything."

"I seem to know nothing."

"Why do you want to learn?"

"I want to know. I want to live, not vegetate. I want to be useful. I want to make a career," Louisa replied, dreamily gazing over the purple hills.

"You are the most extraordinary person I ever met," cried Amy, "and so talented. Have I any talent?"

"Talent enough, but no ambition, no industry.

Your wits are far beyond any girl's at White How."

"Well, they need be. But what is the good? Next year I shall go home and spend my life like Grace and Georgie, going to parties, receiving callers, shopping, and making clothes. If I were a man, or had to do something for a living! I wish to goodness I was obliged to work."

"And yet I am not satisfied."

"You don't like teaching? Well, neither should I, especially unruly girls like us."

"I have not the gift of teaching. Besides, we are not teaching you the right things in the right way."

"Then why don't you set to work and do it?"

"Parents would never send their girls to us if I did, as Miss Sterne often complains. Well, you shall learn Greek, and you shall, even if circumstances compel you to do a great deal of visiting and dressmaking, at least keep some corner of your life for better things."

"Life seems to be a muddle; everything is such rot," cried Amy, making ducks and drakes with

flat pebbles over the pellucid water. "I don't want to come out. Boys don't come out. Miss Stanley, what would you do if you were not a governess?"

"I would have a profession; I should like to be a surgeon."

"Splendid! But women can't."

"Why not? Ah, there's the recall!"

There was no help for it. They had to rise and make their way to the landing-place, where girls swarmed round the boats, handing in cushions, books, luncheon, flowers and plants. Heads were counted, places and oars assigned, the signal for starting given, and they pushed off over the sunny waters, making the shadows of the fells tremble in their wake. They rowed among fairy-like islets, crowned with dark rocks and trees, carpeted with moss and flowers. A pair of swans followed them, bending their beautiful necks to take biscuits the girls threw, and making sudden sweeps after some morsel carried away by the water. Amy, bending easily to the light oars, pulled a noble stroke; it was difficult to pair her with any girl. Langdale

Pikes were growing glorious in clouds of molten gold, High Street and Coniston gathering purple shadows about them, Ambleside fading into indistinct rose-mists, while Wray Castle stood out gray and solitary, like some venerable relic of feudal splendour, or legendary tower dear to poets; Amy was thinking of this new stimulating notion that women might be doctors. Pleasure boats flitted by in shadow and sun-light, a little steamer dashed hastily along, leaving a silver furrow behind it. The girls sang "*O Dolce Napoli, O suol beato,*" to the light plash of oars, and "Row, Brothers, Row," one boat answering the other till they reached Bowness Bay, where difficult navigation compelled them to break off as they wound among numerous little barks. This was the time for eager conversation, laughing, and such obvious jesting as excites the ready mirth of schoolgirls.

Amy's place was by Louisa as the school crocodile wound up the steep street, past heavy stone houses pitched here and there as if at random.

"Miss Stanley, is it unfeminine to know much?" she asked.

"Was Lady Jane Grey unfeminine? or Elizabeth Herschel? or Mary Somerville? or Vittoria Colonna?"

"But strong minded females, Women's Rights women and all those, aren't they rather horrid?"

"If they are horrid, it is not because they know too much, but because they know too little. They have been instructed, but not educated, not drawn out.

"Miss Stanley," Amy flushed hotly and paused.

"Well?"

"Don't men hate learned women?"

"Do they? What if they do?"

"Only I should not like men to hate me. I shouldn't like to be an old maid," she blurted out, growing redder and redder.

"Then don't be a young owl. Knowing Greek will not unfit a girl to be a wife. Oh! my dear Amy, half the misery of life comes from wives knowing nothing that interests their husbands."

"You don't think it silly, then, to think of being married?"

"Young women ought to think, and think seriously, of marriage.

"I begin to love you, Miss Stanley. I think I always liked you, though you are a governess. This sweet Greek! Pity it's Sunday to-morrow."

Tea at white How was a noble function, the only drawback to which was its brevity. Girls rose hungry from table purely because they had not had the time to satisfy the regal appetites they acquired in that bracing mountain air, appetites unspoiled by excess and fostered by regular hours and constant occupation. The table, ringed round by rosy girl faces, was pleasant to behold. The teapot was supplemented by terra-cotta jars of water; no excess in that pernicious and seductive cup was therefore possible. A noble ham, brown loaves, piles of oat-cake, glasses of honey, treacle and jam, pickled char—a fish caught in the lake, Eccles cakes—a kind of large sandwich mince pie, apple cakes, fresh sweet butter and rye bread; all pleased girlish palates, all vanished swiftly and silently. The business before them was far too serious for conversation, which was

further hampered by being held in French.

"*Passez le sel, s'il vous plait.*"

"*En voulez-vous encore ?*"

"*Merci.*" Such was the exciting and pleasing tenor of this table-talk. There was, in consequence, more time for reflection, and also for enjoying beauty through the large, open windows which looked over the little town with its square grey tower, the placid lake, and the mountains, high above which Langdale Pikes rose darkly against a rose-flushed sky, having half the lake in shadow. Tea finished, girls strolled in the garden, or sat in the verandah under the eye—they were always under some eye—of Mademoiselle. Then, in an upper chamber, known as the music-room, the scene of many conflicts with the music-master, the first delightful Greek lesson was given.

Happy hour, happy, eager pupil, happy teacher! Lake and mountains changing in the setting sun, long-lingering Northern afterglow shedding pale lustre over dark shoulders of Fells, a wan, white star trembling into lucid gold-green above the hill, were mingled with the fascination of

those novel characters, henceforth to be friends for life, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. A blackbird sang in fresh-leaved woods below, orange points came out on the margin of the lake, a steamer's green light played on the still wave, when the last load of passengers was discharged on the quay. Every character in that curious, interesting alphabet, every inflection of the first noun learnt that night, sank deeply, enchantingly in the scholar's memory, and ever after recalled the charms of that pleasant twilight hour, the blackbird's flute notes, the steamer's throb in the water and the sound of her bell, as well as the deep and romantic affection for the teacher that sprang up in the pupil's heart.

Louisa's gentle manner and soft accent were models constantly held before the school; she suggested enough beauty to touch the hearts of girls in their teens; she was popular, ruled firmly, entered into sports, and knew how not to see trifles. It was whispered that she spoke Sanscrit, and had refused the hand of an Oxford professor in faultless Greek. Louisa was particular about the fit of her clothes, and the harmony of her

colours; she never wore bad gloves; this redeeming weakness gave her more power over her girl scholars than all the virtues and all the talents put together. She was the only daughter of an Oxford Don, who, renouncing his celibate fellowship for a country benefice, had married late in life and died ten years later, after a year's widowhood, leaving just enough property to bring up and educate his son and daughter, transmitting to the latter a taste for study and a well-developed active brain, to the former, now in the army, little but his name. Thus, having so, few natural ties, Louisa was the more ready to respond to the adoring affection Amy Langton lavished upon her; at twenty-three she was scarcely older in heart than Amy at seventeen. Louisa had two ruling ideas; the emancipation of her sex from ignorance, frivolity, prejudice, and petty tyranny, and a desire to console and heal. The latter, together with a native scientific bent, made her wish to be a physician and surgeon. Amy, with more imagination, had a similar leaning towards science. She had been a troublesome child, who cut open bellows to see

where the wind came from, and worried her elders for a reason for everything.

After the happy Greek lesson, associated ever after with delicate beryl green of afterglow, dark mountains, purple zenith, distant laughter of schoolmates, faint sounds rising with blue smoke from the village, and the fresh smell of May foliage, associated above all with Louisa's voice and looks, Amy began to look forward to a liveable life, full of aims and interests. Hitherto the life after school had been thought of as an ending to all things, like death, but with no desirable hereafter.

Other studies were soon added to the Greek. Time for these was filched from early morning and half-holidays; often the two saw the sun rise over Westmorland fells and waters. Now a dark mass of mountain would be crested with rosy gold, gradually stealing downwards till it blushed sudden crimson over the pale mirror of the lake; The crimson would change to purple, orange, pale gold. Then the lake would turn to delicate blue, with a whitish satiny gloss in sunshine, to clear rich brown in shadow, the brown of the high moors, whence the waters descended. Mists

would float in capricious shapes about the hill, a solid white cloud would brood over the lake like a sleep, the hill-tops standing clear in morning gold above, while the lake lay still and dark beneath, with boats' shadows cut sharply upon it. Gradually the white cloud warmed to deep purple and crimson; again the crimson paled to rose, the rose to salmon, to primrose, to nothing, when the unveiled lake and mountains were spread out clear in the morning light. Then rose matins of early blackbirds and thrushes; the bleak moors and windy fells of Westmoreland are too cold for larks. In winter, wrapped in shawls and shivering in the light of a solitary taper, the students saw the hill-tops, nearly always covered with snow, gleaming beneath frosty stars and wintry moons; at times the weird lustre of an Aurora spread over the sky, ribs of light springing from horizon to zenith, where they met in a crown, like the stone ribs of a vaulted roof. These solitary studies in the death-like stillness of the sleeping house, had a tinge of romance and mystery that enhanced their charm; there was keener delight in

knowledge bought at the expense of ease and comfort.

So when the sad moment arrived for her to take final leave of White How, Amy Langton left it in glowing health with deep regret, but with promises to her friend to correspond and pursue her studies at home.

But Louisa! She was thinner, paler, more ethereal in appearance than ever.

CHAPTER III

"And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost and deep almost as life."

"WHAT *am* I to do with Amy?" Mrs. Langton asked her stepson Steven, the head of the family, an ex-captain of dragoons of about forty-five.

"What has she been doing now, mother?"

"She is so utterly unlike other girls. She will think; and she will say what she thinks, which is worse. She reads Julius' medical books; the most shocking things, my dear Steven. And she dislikes society. She wants to go to Girton. Grace's sisterhoods, slummings, and perpetual church-goings are bad enough. Cecil cannot do upon his pay in the Sealing Wax Office. Poor Algernon, of course, is a trial. Georgie is my only comfort. But Amy, hidden away in corners with books and bones and dissections of dead bats and birds, is something appalling."

"Shocking, mother, shocking! Still, Amy isn't a bad little maid, and she's young, too. Eighteen, isn't it?"

"Now she wants to study at this new school of medicine for women, thanks to that horrid governess, Louisa Stanley."

"Let her come to us for a few months. I'll reason with her. Alice will urge her to sweet reasonableness. We'll make a woman of her."

So Amy went to Baron's Cleeve for a few months. Her brother reasoned with her for a few months; his wife likewise. The immaculate Lester, whose little estate, Croft Hall, was near, frequently called, dined, lunched, and slept at Baron's Cleeve during those few months, and reasoned with her, but she was still immovable. Mr. Lester was at this time much burdened with responsibility for the moral welfare of his neighbours, which he lost no opportunity of trying to promote by precept as well as example. Amy thus had the advantage of counsel's opinion against her project, to which she remained firm, nevertheless.

When she went home, she importuned her mother daily to save her from the emptiness of the life of an ordinary spinster at home. She spoke of Mrs. Langton's recent losses, and of her straitened means in case of the stepbrother's death. "The boys will marry," she said. "Boys always do. Cecil will never be rich, and always extravagant. Algernon has already spent his money, and wants more; Julius will never make a fortune. Grace, Georgie, and Lucy, when they marry, will take their portions. How little will be left!"

"And Amy, when she marries?"

"Amy will never marry," she replied; "and if she does," she added inconsequently, "she will first make a stipulation that her mother is provided for."

Mrs. Langton was touched. None of her other children had troubled themselves much about a future provision for her.

Finally, Amy won her point. Steven persuaded her mother that a few years' study would, at least, be good discipline for the young woman. "The whim will soon pass if not made stronger by opposition," he said. Amy's god-mother had left

her a few hundred pounds; this would pay the expenses of her studies. "You can buy a good deal of experience with £300," Steven maintained. So Mrs. Langton reluctantly yielded, to the intense anger of Cecil and Julius, who refused to meet their sister while she studied medicine. Amy therefore shared Louisa Stanley's rooms, an exile from Angel Road.

"I am afraid we shall find the want of male society a great void in our life," Amy said one evening, when the friends were sitting over their fire after dinner.

"Of course we shall, and our development will suffer in consequence. But that cannot be helped. These conventionalities will pass and men's prejudices will give way."

"Yes, we are only pioneers after all, though the first roughness of the way has already been smoothed for us by more daring spirits. We must be content to give up the softer things of life."

"Certainly. We must be careful not to marry, for instance. It would be a good plan to found a secular order of celibates. At all events

you and I will take vows against marriage, Amy."

"Why bind oneself by vows?"

"Lest we should be tempted. We must certainly not marry, Amy," repeated Louisa.

"I don't know about that," replied Amy.

"Ah! Amy," returned Louisa, reproachfully; "You are weak! You are not prepared to sacrifice yourself to the Cause."

"Suppose it should involve sacrificing somebody else?"

"You traitor! you are in love."

"I am not," replied Amy. "But I am human."

"Even if I should lose my health,"——Louisa added after a pause.

"Louie," the other interrupted, "You are not really ill, are you?"

"No; only feeling the effects of governess life. I left off and entered this haven of rest just in time. You are strong enough."

"Almost too strong; I never know how to throw off my superfluous energy."

"There is another disadvantage for us. We

have no physical training, like those noisy boys at St. Scalpel's, and our recreations must be so painfully few and select."

"Amy, be very careful, and on no account form intimacies with men," her mother said one day, after many other injunctions, when visiting the exile at her apartments in town.

"I will indeed, mother," replied Amy, throwing her arms round her mother's neck and kissing her, "But I can't help laughing; your advice is so superfluous. In Angel Road I had a hundred times the opportunity for such intimacies. In rooms with Louisa, fenced round by all the bulwarks of conventionality, I am as safe as in a convent."

"Conversaziones," murmured Mrs. Langton, half suffocated by her child's embrace, "Professors, queer people at medical women's houses."

"Nearly all married, all ugly, many old. Dear mother, they are about as dangerous as the mummies in the British Museum."

"Doctors," pleaded Mrs. Langton.

"All hate us, but one, and he is madly in love with Louie."

"Actually in love with her!" cried Mrs. Langton, freeing herself from Amy's arms. "And are they engaged?"

"Oh! dear no; Louie doesn't care for him. They seldom meet, except in the street."

"Then pray, how do you know?"

"I see it in his eyes."

"You see far too much," complained the mother.

Exiled from Angel Road, Amy passed part of the summer vacation with her stepbrother at Baron's Cleeve, where she frequently met and argued with Lester, whose appetite for these conflicts grew with indulgence, and whose opinions strengthened with opposition.

"I have millions of things to tell you," he said in the course of a visit one sunny afternoon, during this holiday, "but do come out. A house is a dungeon to-day."

What more natural than to stroll along terraces until they reached a trellised arbour of vine and fig trees. What more natural and pleasant and conducive to the confidences of friendship?"

The Immaculate forgot his million things for

about half-an-hour, then he spoke of his plans. He was about to make a Swiss tour. There was no longer any chance of a county election, the present member had no intention of resigning, as had been supposed. Lester was on the whole glad, being still too unsettled in his opinions for party politics. Amy was sorry. She thought definite duties and aims would give stability and concentration to his character. In this he agreed. "By the way, if I were really in Parliament, dear pythoness," he said, having so styled her because of her oracular speeches, "and that little apple of discord, Female Suffrage, were thrown amongst us, I should not be on your side."

"Not yet. The many will never be on our side, but descendants of this generation of either sex will contend in the House of Commons."

"Let me be spared the sight, dear prophetess."

"Society must progress," she continued, "and women will rise with men; the great tidal wave is set in motion, it cannot turn till it has reached the flood. Everybody is against our cause; many are against us. The struggle is killing Louisa by inches. It shan't kill me."

"Give it up in time," he said, half amused, half touched by her earnestness.

"Never."

"What is to be done? Argument is useless, compulsion out of the question. But it is hard to stand by and see friends destroy themselves."

Amy gathered a white rose; she paused and thought. "You are the only person who has ever really shaken my purpose," she said, after a time.

"Perhaps no one else has ever had so true an interest in you and in your welfare," he returned. "I would do anything on earth to save you from this dreadful fate. Let me be your knight; let me rescue you."

"Thank you, I would rather not be rescued," she replied, flushing slowly and deeply.

"Think, dearest prophetess, he added earnestly; "We may not meet, as we are meeting, again for months, perhaps years. You might be so happy in a natural womanly way. You might make at least one person so happy." She quivered at this, but made no reply.

Then the old ground of woman's fitness and

unfitness was gone over, the charms of seclusion, meekness, and dependence were advocated, the beauty of wifely and motherly virtues extolled, and the loneliness of professional women's lives dwelt upon.

She was greatly touched. She felt that their friendship, that ideal and equal friendship between man and woman, of which she had alternately dreamed and doubted, was a real and pleasant thing to both. She felt that it must now come to an end, or culminate in something more agitating and imperious. "I am not ungrateful," she replied, after some consideration, "but I am quite decided."

"Think again," he said, not without anger. Then, going down to a lower terrace, he paced its length twice, and returned with some carnations in his hand.

"Have you been thinking?" he asked, with something in the depths of his dark eyes never before seen by Amy, who was sitting in full sunshine on the low parapet that edged the terrace. She looked away over the wide prospect of sunny harvest fields, woods, hills,

and sea, before she replied in a steady voice,

"I have been thinking how sorry I am that you and I will never be able to talk solemn nonsense together about things in general again."

"I was a fool to think I could move you," he exclaimed, dashing the flowers on the stones.

"You are angry?" rather tremulously.

"I am sorry," in a softened voice.

They looked at the river on which they had rowed together, the woods and fields in which they had wandered in their brief holiday, and both sighed.

"Good-bye, Amy," he said, lingering; "Good-bye," she replied in a faint voice. Again he said "Good-bye," turned away, came back and said, "Come what may, let me still be your friend."

"Your friend," she echoed.

He was gone. She tried to concentrate her attention on the "Descent of Man." She had no time for sentimental regrets and fond imaginings in her busy, strenuous life. But Amy's pillow was wet with tears that night.

One sunny January day the Immaculate Lester, with the weight of five more years upon his head, and the accumulated wisdom of the same time within it, was leisurely walking along a winding road in the Riviera, rejoicing in the bright exhilarating air from a sapphire sea that broke in a white streak of hidden foam far below. Arrived the night before, he had left London a fortnight ago in a rich brown fog, since when he had been at Pisa, in a narrow room, made dreary by sickness and death, and the sorrow of a newly orphaned girl.

He leant over a low wall by the road, pressing a white cluster of violets growing in a crevice. Here was a bush of blossomed thyme, full of murmuring bees, a green, bright-eyed lizard flashed across the stone wall. Ships with curved lateen sails flitted over the clear blue, sea gulls sunned white breasts on waves, the song of fishers was borne faintly across the waters. The bare boughs of plane, vine, and fig were scarcely seen among broad-leaved palms, spiked aloes, orange and lemon groves, shining myrtles, clothing the steeps below. Above, a majestic amphitheatre of moun-

tains surrounded and sheltered these sunny declivities from bitter blasts that swept over Central Europe and rushed with concentrated fierceness through Alpine passes. Sterile mountain crags stood bare against the blue sky at the verge of the amphitheatre, their strong flanks of limestone, seamed and scored by the storms of ages, fringed below by pine woods, lower still by a series of foot-hills, clad with chestnut, oak, and solemn, grey-stemmed olives, and cleft by gorges threaded by little bickering streams, sometimes swollen to torrents. The remains of a mediæval stronghold crested one wooded peak. Peasants in peaked hats led their sagacious, well-laden donkeys down the paths, and handsome girls balanced baskets gracefully upon their heads. A little eminence beneath was crested by a slender-stemmed stone pine, the dome of which was outlined on the translucent blue of the Mediterranean.

After his farewell on the terrace at Baron's Cleeve, the Immaculate had been seen little in those regions, never by Amy. Nor did they meet elsewhere, nor did Amy realise the significance of the farewell, or of what preceded it. But the

blameless knight, whose virtues increased—his friends maintained—alarmingly with age, had not been idle in these years. He went on circuit for a time; he then went to the East, to India, Australia, America, peeped at New Zealand and South Africa, glanced at Europe. He scribbled on most subjects, and was infallible on all. He had for the last two years represented the borough of Dalesby. He was still as beautiful as the day, and as polite as Sir Charles Grandison.

Leaving the carriage road, he was beginning to climb a wild mountain path, when he perceived another traveller a little further on. She was tall, she moved gracefully in a well-fitting serge gown. A botanical tin was slung over her shoulder, a roll of white cambric was round her shady hat. She was taking a plant from a sunny bank, so Lester only saw her outline, and some thick plaits of brown hair shining in the sun. She turned at his step and looked up with a flush of pleasure and surprise.

"Amy Langton," he cried.

It was indeed Amy; her angles turned to curves, her gawkiness to grace, her eyes bright with pleasure and kindness. "I should have known

you anywhere," she exclaimed. "You are not a bit altered."

"But you are much changed," he said, "for the better," he thought.

She looked so radiantly happy and so brilliantly healthful it took away a month of low spirits to look at her. "Why is she so happy?" he wondered. "Has she given up physic?"

"No, I am not alone, Mr. Lester; a carriage full of invalids belonging to me is going round by the road. Lettice and I got out to walk. We are to meet by that clump of olives."

"Lettice?"

"Lettice Marshall, my brother Cecil's wife's sister."

They walked over some broken ground towards the olives, Amy giving him an account of her invalids; of Louisa Stanley, now a fully qualified surgeon and M.D. in broken health; of Grace, who had fallen into a pining state during her last year in an Anglican Sisterhood; and of Lettice Marshall, who had recently recovered from fever. Amy, who had gone through all studies and passed all needful examinations to be

an M.D. and general practitioner, was taking care of the party medically, socially and financially, and enjoying a delightful holiday as well. Mrs. Langton, in consequence of Cecil's marriage, was now obliged to reduce her establishment. She had had losses besides. But, Cecil being gone, Amy was at liberty to visit at Angel Road. Her reconciliation with Julius had been very gradual. They now met with the stipulation that Amy should never refer to professional topics, and were as friendly as ever. "I would rather see you in your coffin," Julius had said; "but since I have done all I could to prevent you, it must be endured."

"Julius," his sister told the Immaculate, "young as he is, is temporary house-surgeon at St. Scalpel's. I am told that his operations are a really beautiful sight." Georgie and Lucy led the old life, dressmaking, calling and shopping by day, and dancing in other people's houses and yawning over fancy work in their own by night. Georgie was quite as pretty and much more amusing than in former times; Lucy, a brilliant pianist and bad musician.

There had been a rumour of Georgie's engagement to Mr. Charles Lovelace, Cecil's friend, of the Sealing Wax Office; it was nothing more than rumour. Since this Mr. Lovelace had happened once to go to the same place as Georgie, he had continued to happen to go to every place in which there was a probability of her appearance.

"What a fool I was in those days," the Immaculate said very wisely.

"Are you so wise now? I liked you well enough as a fool. You would not be so nice without your follies."

This walk was one of those few purely blissful memories that smile along the waste of years. So pleasant it was, that it occurred to the Immaculate, as they strolled on, to spend a few weeks in the Riviera, instead of returning to England in a few days, as he had intended.

CHAPTER IV

" Indi i monti Ligustici e Riviera,
Che, con aranci e sempre verdi mirti,
Quasi avendo perpetua primavera,
Sparge per l'aria ben olenti spirti."

ARIOSTO

"AMONGST other important events occurring since we last met," Lester said, in the course of this delightful mountain walk, "I have become a parent—by adoption."

"A parent?"

"Yes; I have come in for a legacy of a little girl, five years old."

"Really? What *will* you do with her?"

"What indeed, Miss Amy?"

An artist, dying penniless in Pisa, had sent for his old college friend, or rather acquaintance, and confided his motherless child to his charity. Lester could not conceive why he, a former acquaintance, lost sight of for so many years, had been chosen by the dying man as

his child's guardian. But Amy, with affectionate pride in her friend, thought she knew why. The adventure seemed highly characteristic of her Bayard, her knight without fear and without reproach. It could have happened to no one else.

Presently they reached some broken ground, where blocks of sandstone were scattered amongst a sparse vegetation of juniper bushes and blooming heather, when the carriage was seen waiting by the olives. Suddenly, hearing a faint cry, and looking up, they saw the slight figure of a girl with a pretty face and shining golden hair, run laughing down a steep descent. A vision of ideal loveliness seemed descending from the blue above, in this fairily-fashioned figure flitting down the rough steep in the sunshine. Seeing the stranger, she tried to stop, caught her foot in some heather and fell. Amy and Lester ran to her: Amy lifted her head and supported it. "Any pain?" she asked in a matter-of-fact voice that Quixote Lester thought hard.

"My foot," she sighed. The laughing, pink-flushed face was white as marble, the delicate

mouth drawn with pain. Lester thought it the most lovely face he had ever seen.

"Come, Letty, don't faint," Amy said, laying the drooping head with its loosened hair on some heather, while she examined the foot, appearing no more moved by her friend's suffering than if a butterfly's wing had been dusted. Had she screamed or fainted, the Immaculate would have liked her better. But she actually laughed. "Why you little silly!" she exclaimed, "your foot is all right. You can stand."

"Oh, I can't, Amy, I know I can't," replied the patient, turning away and hiding her face.

"She is fainting," cried Lester indignantly, raising her very carefully in his arms.

"She had better not let me see her faint. There is a nice cool well down there, Miss Letty, if you want to faint."

Speechless with indignation, the Immaculate lifted the girl's light figure in his arms, carrying her carefully and easily over the broken ground to the carriage, in which Louisa Stanley and Grace Langton were waiting. "Could

you meet Mr. Lester under more appropriate circumstances?" said Louisa in an undertone as he approached the vehicle with his lovely burden, and placed the patient carefully in the carriage, whence she gave him a grateful look from eyes grey as glass.

"Oh, Miss Langton, I did not recognise you at first in this garb. How are you?" he said, startled by the face of Sister Avis, and wondering at his former admiration for this wasted worn woman.

"No longer Miss Langton; Sister Avis," she corrected with a wan smile.

The carriage drove off; the gentle knight caught sight of a gleaming tress of gold hair as it disappeared round the bend of the road. Then he sat upon the gnarled and twisted roots of an olive, and gazed out upon the sparkling sea in a deep reverie.

It was quite late when the Immaculate reached his hotel at Col Aprico. Shadows were sloping, the sea was tinged with purple. A little dark figure, two little dark figures, were in the hotel garden, looking out anxiously. One was four-

footed and welcomed his approach by flying out with short, joyous barks, and scurrying along the dusty road to meet him. This was Nep, the dead artist's retriever, who had transferred his second-class affections to his dead master's friend and successor, the first being reserved for Angela. While he was yet in a perfect agony of whining, barking and tail-wagging, his little mistress, whose feet had meanwhile borne her less swiftly along the sunny road, arrived with streaming hair and outstretched arms, followed by an anxious scolding nurse, and added her caresses to the dog's. Lester lifted her in his arms, kissed her and carried her back to the hotel.

"I thought you were dead, Carino," said the child in broken Italian. "I thought the wolves had eaten you."

"The Signorina has cried for two hours and eaten no dinner," added Perpetua, the nurse. When he felt the little arms round his neck, the round cheek pressed against his face, he thought he had a good legacy.

Col Aprico is a health resort not very far from Mentone and at no great distance from Genoa. There Lester had rooms with a sunny outlook, in the "Montone d'Oro," while seeking a more suitable cage for his bird. Not far from the "Montone d'Oro," a little higher up on the sunny slope that gave its name to Col Aprico, was Villa Dolc' Acqua, a boarding-house or *pension* kept by a German lady, who exercised a kindly, if tyrannical, supervision over her invalids of many nations, and under whose benevolent wing the Langton party had taken refuge.

No sooner had the carriage turned the corner of the road and vanished from the sight of her gallant deliverer than Lettice Marshall's faintness disappeared; she sat up and asked with interest how it was that Mr. Lester contrived to appear so unexpectedly and so opportunely on the spot. "I think, Amy, you might have introduced him," she added.

"You saved me the trouble. Nothing could have been more perfect than your mutual introduction to one another."

"The Immaculate will cherish a life-long gratitude to Lettice for appearing in the character of distressed damsel," added Louisa Stanley.

"It is fortunate that Letty's faints never occur when she is out of reach of masculine succour," added Amy, with unusual asperity.

"At all events, I neglected this opportunity," replied Lettice, sweetly, "and you must acknowledge that it was a good one."

"It would have been a pity to waste a faint," returned Amy, acidly, "when a twisted foot did quite as well."

"I forgive you, dear," said Lettice, with imperturbable sweetness. "I admit that it was unkind to disturb that very interesting *tête-à-tête*. I should have kept discreetly out of the way. But why do you call him the Immaculate? Carrie says he is not priggish, only perfect.''

"Without any humbug, what a good fellow he is!" Amy exclaimed, in her impulsive way. "Fancy a young man like that burdening himself with a little destitute child! Isn't it just like our Bayard, Grace?"

"He was always kind, Amy."

"Well, really this *is* a revelation. A man exists whom Amy admires," murmured Lettice. "And does he admire you?" she added sweetly.

"Oh, no. He has the greatest horror of medical women."

"And yet you are devoted to him? How touching! What a thing it is to be clever and strong, and to have platonic friendships."

All the pleasure Amy had felt in meeting the Immaculate once more, all the innocent happiness she had expressed vanished. She did not know why, but she wished he had not come to Col Aprico.

The approach to Villa Dolc' Acqua was by a gate between two square massive pillars opening on to an alley formed by similar pillars, bearing creepers trained across from pillar to pillar. Between the pillars on one side the eye ranged over a lemon-orchard in bloom, and thence down green declivities to the dark calm sea. Here, next morning, Lester, with the little dark-eyed child and big black dog, appeared. The child danced at his side, clinging to his hand and

gazing up in his face while she prattled in the Italian that came quickly, yet brokenly, to her lips, and of which he could only occasionally catch the meaning, to the amusement and anger of the child, who laughed at his stupidity, and punished him with pinches.

"Did you pinch your father like that?" he asked, in his difficult Italian.

"No," replied Angela; "he was not a fool. He understood."

"You are naughty," he said, looking severely at the small creature. "If you pinch or say 'fool' again I shall—whip—you."

Bursting into a shout of laughter, the imp ran to play with Nep. "You are too much afraid of hurting," she cried derisively. The Immaculate felt that this was wrong; he was puzzled.

They met a pale young Frenchman arm-in-arm with a hectic Swede on their way, and, turning a corner beneath a small cliff of bare rock partially covered by creepers and climbing geraniums, entered a sunny flowery cove furnished with garden seats and tables. Here Amy and Lettice were playing ball with green lemons, aim-

ing at each other's faces. The Immaculate, surprised to see yesterday's patient so agile, greatly admired the spectacle, which was very pleasant and picturesque, especially to one ignorant of tennis and cycling, involving swift, graceful movements, flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and gusts of laughter. Amy could tie herself into true lover's knots, and do wonderful things on the horizontal bar; Lettice had scarcely lost the supple grace of childhood. Thus they were very quick and deft at the game, reminding him of Nausicaa and her maidens playing at ball by that very sea. He assumed that the injured foot was healed.

"Oh, it was never really hurt," Lettice replied, laughing and pushing her bright hair into place. "What a coward I am! My foot ached, and I turned faint, and thought I was half-killed; that was all."

"We don't expect ladies to be very brave," replied the chivalrous Lester. "They are not made of iron."

"Ah! how refreshing to hear that," returned Lettice, with her lovely smile. "I'm scolded all

day long for cowardice and folly. I don't want to be wise and brave. I like to be petted and taken care of."

"How natural and how charming!" he thought, dazzled by the laughing blue-grey eyes.

"I ought to thank you for your kindness yesterday," continued Lettice. "I must have made your arms ache."

"Not in the least. So glad and proud to have been of service."

"Is this your legacy?" asked Amy, indicating the child.

"What a little sweet!" cried Lettice, opening her arms. "Come and speak to me, dear."

"Go Angela," Lester said, in Italian; but she turned to her protector, clasping him by the knee and hiding her face.

"Don't tease her," Amy said. "Poor mite, does she speak no English?"

"A little. She is only five," replied Vivian, stroking the dark curls against his knee. "Miss Amy, I am glad to see you in such beautiful spirits this morning. Come, Angela, come." But Angela declined to unclasp her hands and

show her face, till Amy addressed her in Italian, when she at once lifted her head, looked in her face, and ran to her.

Lettice flitted on to warn Frau von Stein of a stranger's approach, and so give her time to make herself presentable. The others followed, Nep stalking behind, surveying the three with critical approval. Amy wore what Lester called her prophetess face; she smiled upon the child with calm compassionate sadness. The prophetic mood that amused him in old times was now somewhat awe-inspiring. She had grown so tall, and was known to be so learned. After all, it was well that she had chosen a self-dependent, if unfeminine, life. Could any man love a being so strong, so superior, so capable? On the other hand, who could fail to respect her, or who would not like to have so true and sure a heart to rely on in time of need?

"There is a nun!" cried Angela, dashing forward and pointing through some shrubs at the figure of Grace sitting by some myrtles, her face bent over a red-edged book.

"Fancy having to say special prayers for every

hour of the day!" Amy said. "Imagine breaking the time of a thinking being into tyrannical chips like that! No study is possible; very few occupations."

"But cannot Sister Avis understand that such things are bad for her health?"

"Certainly not. Sister Avis has renounced the conduct of her understanding, though Grace Langton is heartily sick of monotonous prayer-grinding. My sister is a slave, Mr. Lester."

"Who is free?" he asked. Once he had had yearnings for a conventual life himself; vested in spotless white, he had a lifted seraphic voice with seraphic looks and genuine devotion. "Is Dr. Amy Langton quite unfettered?"

Frau von Stein and a detachment of her children were discovered on the verandah, enjoying the sunshine; the good Frau in a clean morning cap and newly washed hands. These eccentric English are full of small prejudices — about clean hands for instance —as if hands could be clean in the morning, when every good Hausfrau is busy

with dusters and pots and pans. Lester addressed her in his best German, to the joy of a young man from the Fatherland, sitting by a fair pale Swiss girl, whose accent he was trying to improve; a blonde Danish girl joined in the German that Louisa and Amy spoke well; Frau von Stein's consumptive niece could feel the breath of German air on her face.

The ladies of Villa Dolc' Acqua were interested in the pretty child, Italian by birth-place, by her mother, by her dark eyes and hair, her speech and her breeding. But Angela did not respond. German, which she considered as a hideous kind of intensified English, frightened her, so did the Italian upon which some of her Teutonic friends ventured. She clung to Vivian and Amy alternately and was not to be beguiled by bon-bons. Nep sat on the gravel in front of the verandah, his paws stretched out before him, and looked on with benevolent condescension. But, when Lettice attempted to draw the child to her by force, he growled and Lester warned her in German that he was dangerous.

"Pray don't speak German to me," replied

Lettice, "I never could understand, much less speak, anything but English."

"Why should you?" he wondered, thinking it quite enough pleasure to hear her voice.

Frau von Stein loved "these mad Englishmen" and made this one welcome, though he worried and confused her by handing cups and chairs and opening doors for her "like a servant"; therefore the Immaculate soon became a frequent and welcome visitor at the *pension.* Sometimes he stayed in the garden, sometimes he accompanied those who were strong enough to walk. One bright morning while Lettice and Amy were setting out on such an excursion, he asked permission to join them with his pets. Climbing a steep path they found better views and brighter flowers for Angela, who adorned Nep with collars of violets and daffodils, which he wore with his accustomed dignity.

"Amy's strength is something frightful," Lettice observed, pausing in the ascent, leaning on Lester's arm, which had already saved her from one or two slips. "She is actually carrying that child."

"I think her strength admirable," he replied, glad that no such strength deprived him of the pleasure of supporting the fairy-like creature upon his arm. "It is like looking at some statue of Pallas or Here, in which strength is so lost in beauty that we feel rather than observe it, while the whole effect is one of calm perfection."

Lettice shot a momentary glance from her bright eyes to his. "I never thought of Amy in connection with statues," she returned slowly with a thoughtful air, her chief notion about statues being that they were deficient in clothing; "but people see things so differently, and *friendship* is sometimes a little blind. Knowing this clever Amy must make you look down upon the rest of us, who like enjoyment and dress, and are frightened to death at—Ai! Ai!" she screamed, as a little green frog hopped across the narrow path.

He looked at her but said nothing, lest he should say too much; he was falling so swiftly under the spell of her exquisite loveliness. The glance revealed much, too much; but Lettice wanted more, she wanted the direct homage of words.

"Ah!" she sighed with a hurt look, "You are too kind to wound me by saying what you think."

The fish immediately swallowed the bait. "I could say nothing that would wound you——" he began, and stopped, intoxicated. "Do you know," he continued after a pause, "that weakness is — loveable? Weakness is a woman's greatest charm."

She was highly amused at these remarks. "You are saying wicked things, for which Amy would kill you," she laughed in her silver treble.

"Is Miss Langton so terrible?" he askĕd, smiling. Just then Amy turned on her upward path, the laughing child in her arms, and looked down upon the pair below. She saw the look upon Lester's face, a transfiguring, almost religious expression, and a spasm of pain shot through her. "There is no doubt about it," she thought. But why should that grieve her? "Surely," she mused, "it is well; for Lettice needs a strong loyal nature to guide her through life."

The magnetism of Amy's gaze caused Vivian to look up. He saw, in the sunshine high up, the child's dark Italian face beneath Amy's fair

English one; the little thing, clinging to the well-poised form, looked down in safe confidence. Sunbeams made a glory in Amy's light brown hair; her smile was pensive, even sad. A moment before it had been in his mind to ask her not to carry the heavy child; now he thought she might carry a world.

Presently they halted on a little terrace, under the shelter of a rock, and looked down soft declivities clothed with verdure and blossom, far down, to the deep, indescribable blue of the quiet sea. Nep chased lizards, Angela butterflies; the others sat in silence, hearing humming bees, distant tinkling cow bells, confused murmur from roads and gardens below; under all, like the sweet burden of a melody, the soft croon of the sea. Swallows flitted out twittering from a warm rocky shelter beneath. Voices of singing girls rose from orange gardens below, where they were piling baskets with Hesperian fruit.

"It is like the gardens of Armida," Amy said.

"Who was Armida?" asked Lettice, with her innocent candour.

"A woman of genius, who made people fall in

love with her. She was very beautiful and unscrupulous."

"She was not a woman at all," Lester added, "but a fiend."

"And then he knew it was a fiend,
That miserable knight,"

quoted Amy.

Among the numerous perfections of the Immaculate were a velvety voice and a pleasant way of reading poetry. Therefore when Lettice, attracted by a wretched knight and a lovely fiendish lady, wished to know their history, he was kind enough to repeat, most musically and impressively—

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
Are all but ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame,"

till Angela, caught by the rhythm and the words "love," "dream," "happy," left her play and leant against Amy's arm to listen.

"And she was there, my hope, my joy,
My own dear Genevieve,"

repeated Lester almost tremblingly, when he found he was thinking of Lettice, while he gazed straight out to sea.

"She listened with a flitting blush,
With downcast eyes and modest grace;
For well she knew I could not choose
But gaze upon her face."

Who could help seeing Lettice in that?

"And so I won my Genevieve,
My bright and beauteous bride,"

the Immaculate ended, with a quiver in his voice.

"Thank you; a pretty tale, but she was very easily won," Lettice remarked.

The others were silent; but Lester carried Angela down the mountain. During the descent, which was not hurried, one of the old discussions arose between him and Amy on such airy trifles as Fate, subjective poetry, drama, enchantments, the use of opium. Lettice listened "with a flitting blush, with down-cast eyes and modest grace," contributing little to the serious and solid conversation beyond a smile or an assent.

When at bedtime, according to custom, Amy went to the room she shared with Louisa Stanley, to be able to attend on her suffering friend at night, she arranged the knotted olive roots burning on the open hearth, and brushed out the shining coils of Lousia's hair, her nightly task.

But though this was the moment for confidences, she brushed in silence to-night.

"What is the matter?" asked Louisa, enjoying the dancing fire-light and the magnetic influence of the brush, with the dreamy languor of consumption.

"Nothing," replied Amy, finishing her labour of love and twisting the long fair hair into a massive coil; "at least, I was thinking of cutting your hair short, this heavy growth weakens you."

"Spare my hair; my one vanity."

"Oh! Louie!" cried Amy, throwing herself on her knees before the glowing wood fire, and burying her face in her lap.

"Well, child?"

"He is in love with her."

"Who is in love with whom?"

"Vivian Lester with Lettice Marshall."

"What of that? Will the world come to an end?"

"You know what she is, Louie, a shallow, selfish girl, and he——"

"Well! he is all very well, but not exactly a demi-god. I always liked your Bayard, Amy,

though he is so fatally perfect. Let us hope that he will strengthen Lettice's character."

"She will drag him down."

"Then he must be made of poor stuff. My dear child, go to sleep, dream that you are physician to the Queen, and leave the Immaculate to fall in love and out again, as best he may."

"My pretty Amy!" Louisa thought, as she tossed on her restless couch, and listened to the sleeper's even breathing; "her affections are as untroubled as her health. But I wish this Perfection would go back to England and leave us in peace."

Amy was dreaming of the ruined tower in the ballad, the low sweet music and the love-stricken knight, who of course wore the features of the blameless Lester. Presently the sleeper's smile faded as the dream darkened; singing of birds arose in the enchanted gardens of Armida, and two Crusaders, with faces like Amy and Angela, sprang from the bushes with drawn swords to free the spell-bound knight from his enchantment.

CHAPTER V

"Tell me where is Fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head,
How begot, how nourishéd?
It is engendered in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and Fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies."

FEBRUARY came, bringing a warmer and longer day, white heath blossom, white lilies, hyacinths, anemones and primroses, and glowing masses of tulips in gardens. The sparsely blooming flowers of winter—geraniums, salvias, and carnations, now blossomed more freely, the scent of wall-flowers and stocks was in the air, camellias became daily more splendid; violets were a weed, mimosa a golden cloud. Those pure white camellias are often put to a melancholy use at this season, when invalids die off.

With February another Parliamentary session opened in England. Members came thronging

back to Westminster, from fox-hunting and shooting, from Egypt, Algiers, Mentone and Rome; but the member for Dalesby was not among them. No very exciting events were forward; England was not even waging a little war, although a few skirmishes had taken place on the borders of British India; there were few Irish grievances; Scotland was lapped in momentary content; Conservatives were in office; the country was not over-run with discharged labourers and half-pay officers; no one for the moment was particularly anxious to disestablish the Church, to abolish the Crown, the Constitution, or the rights of property. Neither Slave Trade nor Factory Acts, Female Suffrage, or Artisans' Dwellings, disturbed the Parliamentary mind, and the gardens of Armida were fair; therefore the Immaculate decided that his country might be trusted to dispense for awhile with his presence.

An enchanter's wand had been waved over the prose of Lester's life, turning it to pure poetry. He seemed to have forgotten that he had only come to the Riviera to place Angela there,

and that a multitude of duties and interests called him back to England. At night he liked to go in the fishing-boats, hauling tarred ropes and handling fish, nets and bait with the fishers, and coming home in the small hours, or even at dawn, drenched and weary, invigorated and delighted. It was beautiful to flit over dark waves beneath the silence of a starry sky and watch the boat's light tremble on the water; to see Col Aprico and the fishing village on the shore below, the distant coast towns and villages sparkle out among orange groves, aloes and caroubs, casting flickering lights on the dark sea; to feel the keen night-breeze, with now and then a scud of rain, a squall of wind, even a storm; to share the anxiety and excitement of the fishermen, to whom weather meant bread, even life. Their *patois* of mixed French and Italian was soon understood; they sang songs to plaintive, monotonous tunes; they were fascinated by the Immaculate's genial courtesy and adaptability, and soon discovered his genuine kindness of heart. Whole pages of Homer and Byron floated through his mind while he bore a part

in whatever was forward on board. Sometimes the song of the Sirens would rise from the sweet sea silence; again Ulysses and his men sped westwards on the last endless voyage over the wine-dark sea. Or Ulysses looked out, homesick, upon the blue waters, from the chamber in which the beautiful nymph sat by her perfumed hearth and span, while actual, present seamen plunged their lances into the fish by the light of fire-buckets at the prows. Or there was the morning plunge in keen cold sea, the swim, the return to little Angela at breakfast; the rosy child clinging to him, caressing him, giving him a home. On sunny days he took her with her nurse for a sail, Amy and Lettice and Frau von Stein often being of the party.

Sometimes the Immaculate passed long sunny hours with the invalids on the verandah or in the garden. On those occasions he was often struck with the sad change in Grace Langton, to whom five years ago he had lost nearly half a heart, so near was this gentle, sweet-faced girl to his ideal. But Sister Avis! faded, haggard, pinched in face and figure, with

constant headaches, mysterious sufferings, and no interest in life! She was an object for pity, indeed, profound pity, but love?—No.

"What has changed your sister?" he asked Amy one day, understanding that Grace had no disease; "if I am not mistaken, she has no true vocation for the religious life."

"Neither has she. She needed occupation; she couldn't stand the emptiness of our frivolous, aimless girl-life. Slumming and church embroidery were not enough for her. So she drifted into this Sisterhood. The severity, monotony and tyranny are killing her. That is all." Her eyes haunted Lester, who was not deficient in feeling; hungry, restless eyes they were, the prison-cells of a struggling soul. Louisa Stanley was an even more piteous spectacle to him in her frailty and feverish energy, with her short dry cough, brilliant colour, transparent hands, and the remains of such singular beauty. What an irony, he thought, on this new notion of learned and professional women.

"Ah!" replied Amy, to some such remarks, "it is not study. I knew Miss Stanley as an

overworked, worried governess, thinking the long hours and perpetual strain of school teaching paradise in comparison with the life of a private governess. It is the repression of every faculty but that of monotonous endurance that kills. The repose of wholesome study came too late."

The Immaculate was deeply grieved; he felt that all these girls ought to have been married long ago, and thus saved. But he could not, under existing social arrangements, marry them all, else would he cheerfully have done his duty as a gallant knight.

Grand discussions took place on the verandah, complicated often by the confusion of tongues prevailing at Villa Dolc' Acqua. During these serious debates, Lettice looked on and down from a supercilious height, occasionally smiling in response to some appeal, or appearing to listen in gracious silence. Not that she actually listened to "dry stuff" about politics, literature, art, science, morals, human nature; but she looked as if she listened, and she looked charming, while she mused upon her bonnets and frocks, or

thought of various little relationships, jealousies and antipathies at Villa Dolc' Acqua, or in the English colony,—of the depth of a certain consumptive clergyman's devotion to Amy, of the extent to which the blameless knight had resigned his affections to her own keeping. This topic was most interesting; she really liked Lester; his homage was more acceptable than that of other men; she appreciated his gracious presence and fine courtesy. The Immaculate was enchanted with the sweet womanly humility with which she listened, thus offering a quiet, unobtrusive sympathy by her silent presence. This still receptivity was the crown of Lettice's charms.

Frau von Stein's weekly receptions were small and early, being arranged for the convenience of her invalids; "der ritterliche Lestare" was almost always among the guests. Col Aprico society was necessarily limited in quantity and chiefly invalid in quality; the von Stein receptions occurred after sunset. Conversation was polyglot, but largely English—of a kind. The ubiquitous Amurkan girl, marvellously dressed

and absolutely at her ease, was not wanting at the evening receptions. The Immaculate's sensitive feelings were often wounded by these damsels; especially by Miss Ada D. Williss, who speedily came to the conclusion that "the Britisher was just real queer, and she had no use for him anyway."

But "our good Herr Lestare's" exquisitely poised feelings were often pained and shocked even by the proceedings in Frau von Stein's *salon*. He insisted on opening doors and placing chairs for ladies, and greatly embarrassed fair-haired Fraülein Anna, Frau von Stein's niece, by wanting to hand coffee and cakes, a prerogative she reserved to herself, according to national custom. Resigning himself sorrowfully to these depraved habits, he learnt at last to look on, tolerant, but martyred, and more beautiful than ever.

On a certain noteworthy evening in early March, a young German, von Wilden, was at the piano, making it rage and roar like an angry Titan, wail and lament like a lost angel, whisper soft ecstacies, breathe exquisite longings, and peal in jubilant exultation. Then

he showered discords upon the keys, as if a demoniac battle were raging within; again a troop of fairies seemed to be tripping to delicate measures in the moonlight; it is impossible to say what this young Teuton did not do with the instrument. A steely flame was in his blue eyes, his flaxen moustache and long hair bristled; his compatriots wept; Lester was so enthralled that he did not observe the departure of Lettice from the room. Presently the music died into rippling sweetness, like hidden brooks; it was so low and soft that the crackling of olive roots on the hearth was heard,—then, like a nymph from the water, arose a melodious Volkslied, simple and artless as a wild bird's song, yet vibrant with elementary feeling.

Von Wilden kept his eye upon a curtain which was drawn across the doorway of the double drawing-room, and modulated the concluding strains into the slow mysterious notes of the immortal "Lorelei," with its burden of unutterable yearning, and deep delicious melancholy. It was taken up in four parts by hidden voices, the curtain was raised, the lamps lowered.

In the brilliant light thrown into the back room, oleanders, palms and myrtles in tubs made a miniature forest, beyond which was the sheen of water (mirrors on the ground, their frames hidden with ivy), out of which, shadowed by more verdure at its base, rose a rock, the summit steeped in yellow light. Above all, in the blaze on the crest of the rock, reclined the fatal, fairy Lorelei, combing her golden hair and singing her mystical song. Her slender white throat and round white arms glittered with jewels; a golden belt, studded with gems, bound her shining white garment. The gold tresses, delicate features and fairy-like form were those of Lettice.

All who could sing joined, as if under a spell, in "*Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,*" Englished thus by the Immaculate—

I know not why I am so holden
By this mysterious woe,
A legend of centuries olden
From memory will not go.
The air is cool, it is darkling,
The Rhine waves peacefully flow,
The tops of the mountains are sparkling
In evening's tranquil glow:
Above is a maiden reclining,
So sweet, so fairily fair;

The light in her jewels is shining,
  She combs her golden hair;
Her comb is of gold, and serious
  And sweetly, singeth she
A song with a deep, mysterious
  And mighty melody:
The fisher, his little bark sailing,
  It seizes with wildest woe;
He sees not the rocks, but, paling,
  Looks up at the golden glow.

Lester scarcely breathed as he looked up at the beautiful vision, spell-bound, his features wan and strange in the dim light.

At last in the wild waves swinging
  The fisher and boat are spun;
And that, with her magic singing,
  The Lorelei has done.

The curtains ran across; a storm of applause arose—"Wunderschön," "Wal, that *was* just elegant," "Ravissant," "Brava," "Well done!" —Then Frau von Stein, who had wept from the first Lorelei note, rose, the guests melted imperceptibly away, and Lester went out into the cool starry night, singing softly like one in glamour,

Her comb is of gold, and serious
  And sweetly singeth she
A song with a deep, mysterious
  And mighty melody.

Alas, poor blameless knight! he lingered long beneath the lemon-flowers, watching the lights fade from the villa. Then he went to the shore, unmoored a boat, and rowed out to sea.

A crescent moon poured a flood of liquid silver on the dark sea plains. Col Aprico, with lessening light-sparkles, lay nestled in the gorge; hoary olives, shining myrtles, caroubs and orange trees stood magically still in the moonbeams. As the boat shot tranquilly on, terraces widened, masses of olive and fir gloomed darkly, rocks gleamed whitely, in silver rain of light. Snow had fallen recently, the higher mountains were tipped with sparkling white, waves washed softly, oars dipped with a musical splash; all was poetry and enchantment. He rowed on and on, over paths of silver, over fields of gloom, beneath wan stars, the magic song in his ears, the Lorelei spell upon him, on and on in silence and night and solitude. Deeper than the lowest depths of the Mediterranean, deeper than unplumbed wastes of deepest ocean, this poor knight thought himself in love.

CHAPTER VI

Celia: "Come, come, wrestle with your affections."
Rosalind: "Oh, they take the part of a better wrestler than myself."

IN the moonlit garden of Villa Dolc' Acqua, breathing flower-scented air and gazing wistfully on the silvered sea, where the solitary boat was a dark speck on the moon's bright path, Amy Langton lingered long, thinking of Lester's face, wan and strained under the Lorelei spell.

"Moon-struck, Amy?" asked Louisa from her bed, when at last she went in.

"Completely lunatic," she replied, "and wicked enough to leave you to brush your own hair."

"I am quite strong now. I shall be able to work again in the summer."

"Ah! dearest physician, heal thyself first."

"You shall do that."

"Don't talk. Go to sleep."

"Amy," said Louisa, starting up suddenly, "if I fail, if I die—remember, it was not the profession."

"Hush! who talks of dying?"

"If I become a confirmed invalid, don't let them say——"

Amy was silent, knowing that her friend would never be well enough to do anything.

"You know it was not the profession," continued Louisa with flushed cheeks. "Remember those years of exhausting drudgery and teaching; how I robbed myself of sleep to get the mental food I was denied by day. And then that early unhappiness! Nothing saps health like that." Amy too well remembered a story of treachery and wrecked happiness heard once in the twilight.

"Sleep, dearest, sleep," she said. "Dream that you are principal of a medical college."

Louisa was nine-and-twenty; she looked scarcely nineteen; in the quiet slumber that soon fell upon her she had an infantine look, the occasional effect of the disease that was consuming her. How much had Louisa's story had to do with her

sickness? Was the unnatural gloom of the cloister or the pining for a lost dream the cause of Sister Avis' weariness of body and spirit? Surely Grace might have been healthy and happy by this time, had she lived a wholesome life. Louisa had so long learnt to rate the man who had broken faith with her at his real worthlessness, that a less laborious, less wearisome struggle against the world might have spared her fatal disease.

Waking in the early sunbeams and looking at the marvels of light upon the dawn-touched sea, Amy's first thought was of the Lorelei spell. She had aimed at living on such a high level, in such a pure, passionless calm of soul, had so loved old tales of lofty maiden lives, of Athenes, Dianas and Teuton prophetesses. Such lives she had thought herself strong enough to follow. And now? Why, why, did the Lorelei spell make her so sad and sick at heart?

She took the geological hammer, likened by the Immaculate in happy times gone by to that of Thor, the botanical tin, a long roll of bread and a piece of cheese, and went out into the beauty of the dawn. The sea was a vast heaving splendour

of millions of jewels and sheets of molten gold, transfusing themselves silently one into the other; the breath of morning was gentle but invigorating. Peasant boys with donkeys, basket-laden girls tripping up mountain paths, boatmen out in the bay, sang as they went their several ways. Flower fragance rose like incense from censers of golden light, every step crushed violets and blossomed thyme in the path, the song of birds, blended with low sea murmurs, and the soughing of pine tops was a chant of joy before the Eastern splendour of sea and sky.

She flitted rapidly and easily in that buoyant air, up the steep, sunny eminence that gives name and shelter to Col Aprico, till she reached an olive grove above it, and rested. A larger expanse of sea and sky was now visible in increasing splendour, the transfusing of jewels and blazing gold was deeper, the great sea spread out its storied waters in burnished glory; her heart thrilled to think of all those waters had seen in ages gone by. That glowing flood touched almost every shore venerable in story and song, the cradles of learning and of

art, of law and religion; its farthest wave was even now kissing the soil of Palestine. Exhilarating thoughts, exhilarating air, exquisite world of beauty and peace!

Farther on she presently came upon a girl milking goats, and asked for a draught of milk. In a few minutes the milking girl's history was told, the story of her father and mother, her brothers and sisters, their goats and olive yard, her betrothal, the little tragedies preceding it, her approaching marriage and the small house that she was to live in. The milking-girl was very happy, she said—milkmaids always are; at least in poems and plays; why can we not all be milkmaids?—She had refused Pietro only five times, of course meaning to have him if he asked long enough. Pietro was a good lad, and "bel garzon." Happy, happy milking girl!

Amy gave her something to buy a wedding present with, and went her way, picturing the girl's homely life with envy, as she walked on. All in it was so calm and restful; nothing stirred it but the season's changes, hopes and fears of the olive harvest and wandering goats, excitements of

lemon picking, of pruning and planting fruit trees and tilling patches of maize.

At the end of the day Amy had walked far and rested long; but the hammer had been idle, the flower tin was empty.

One subtle movement of soul had taken all the taste and spirit out of her life; yesterday it was the rose blooming on the stem, to-day the rose cut and withered in the sun.

> " Were it not better done as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade ?"

Something nobler replied, " No; life has better things than happiness."

Everything suddenly seemed more difficult, less worth doing; life had become arid, barren of interest; the past was dreary to remember, the future weary to anticipate. For there could never be any joy, nothing to anticipate but work and struggle; a grey sunless life. What struggles Louisa and she had made to gain their professional knowledge. Amy had spent vacations in teaching children, supplementing nursing staffs, and writing for magazines. How they had been pushed about from examining body to examining body, found

perfect and then denied diplomas! What antagonism they had encountered in private and public! They had figured in public prints as "unwomanly women." Personal rudeness and unmanly sneers they had received, but not the actual physical violence some older friends had suffered at the hands of chivalrous men students at a great historic city in the north. Those ladies, it seemed, had to be hustled and knocked about and forcibly expelled from lectures, lest the knowledge of the laws that govern, and the harmony that pervades, organic life should blunt their finer feelings. Vexed by a thousand arbitrary obstacles to study, while their brothers' studies were cradled and fostered in silk and velvet, they had still surmounted them; but would she—for Louisa's race was run—have courage to face those offered to the practice of that hardly won profession; arbitrary obstacles and barriers made lest the finer, feebler stuff of female minds should be strained by over-much labour? Yet they had conquered so far. Are women, then, made of more heroic stuff than men?

Such thoughts revolved all day in her brain,

gradually and insensibly soothed by the beauty and calm of the hills. A solemn still voice spoke peace from the deep heart of mighty nature, the undying friend of man. "I am great," that calm voice said, "but there is a greater. Have no fear; only be true, unselfish, noble. Live up to the fuller light dawning within. Let happiness take care for itself."

Thus exalted in spirit, she came down the mountain path, into the purple glory of evening, that burnt in her wind-blown hair, and transfigured her face. The first star swung tremulous in the pale green West; Villa Dolc' Acqua was still far away, when something black bounded up the steep path in the purple gloom with a joyous whine, heralding his master.

"Ah! my Bayard! why, why did I not listen to you, long ago? Why was I blind and deaf and stupid? Nobody and nothing is like you in the whole world," she thought. Let them call him a prig—perhaps she was another—he might be impossibly perfect, too fond of regenerating mankind by his own unaided wisdom, too much inclined to preach and prose; still he was in truth

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a very perfect gentle knight; he was made of sterling stuff, and he was young, and she was young, and—he was bewitched by the Lorelei's song.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the Immaculate, springing up the path in the gathering dusk in his proper person. "And where *have* you been the whole day long?"

"I've been geologising and botanising, as you see. There is nothing the matter."

"But, dear prophetess, you are pale. You are not looking happy."

"Who is happy?" returned the Sibyl; "Life is not always easy."

"But it should be. Come, dear prophetess, can't I help you? Nothing I can do? I don't like to see you pale and sad."

"Not sad; a little tired. I've been thinking."

"Ah! Dr. Amy, your good angel, believe me, has spoken to you—indeed it has struck me of late that something was stirring within you. You have been different—at one time I thought you were vexed with me—but I see now, that you are perceiving the mistake

of your life. It is not too late to change."

"Much too late."

"No, not too late. A character with such fine elements as yours. Try a happier life; natural and feminine like——"

"Like Lettice's?"

"Exactly. That is a life that soothes and elevates one to contemplate."

"It does not soothe or elevate me in the least. No, Mr. Lester, your eloquence is wasted. My good angel has indeed spoken and counselled me —to go on. But I must go home. I am tired."

"At least take my arm."

"Thank you, no. I am best alone when tired. I am always best alone."

"Take warning from your friend's fate. The life has killed her."

"Not this life," Amy said, "something far more wearing."

"Dear Miss Amy, are you a real woman or a goddess?"

"Oh, a goddess," she replied. "Can you doubt it?"

"I believe it. I always thought it; I am awed

by you. You are a higher, an unearthly being, superior to human weakness. But, dear goddess, I have not yet told you." The Immaculate came to a full stop; perhaps he blushed.

"Nothing wrong with Angela, I hope?"

"No, and yet—I have to leave Angela—I am going back to England."

"Poor neglected England! It's about time. Who knows but the empire may already be beyond even your succour?"

"You are severe. I shall be gone about ten days. Will you take the child in my absence?" asked the Immaculate, whose virtues were almost redeemed by his good temper.

"Certainly, if you can trust her."

"As for trusting! This is real friendship, Amy. In gratitude for which I shall make further demands——"

"I am tired," she said petulantly, turning towards a bench under an olive, where she rested; "The moon is rising. I hope that no bad news calls you to England," she added, looking down at the dark sea.

"No; not bad news."

"Then you want no sympathy," she replied with concentrated essence of gall.

"Ah, but I do. It takes two to be happy," was the profound rejoinder. "Do you remember our old talks, of the ideal I hoped to realise?"

"Perfectly. You were to inform me when the catastrophe occurred."

"It has occurred."

"Quite unnecessary to tell me."

"Why?"

"Because my eyesight is good."

"Ah! Do you think others have seen? Has *she* seen?"

"Others have not seen. And Lettice—what she thinks I do not mean to tell. If you can't make love at first hand, you can go without a wife."

"Oh! thank you; thank you *so* much. But I must wait ten days before I may venture to take decisive steps to make sure."

"Don't you think her worth waiting for?"

"Ah! Amy, you have never been in love."

"How do *you* know? Somebody waited twice seven years once."

"I would wait thrice—for her."

She thought it would be a good plan.

"I have known her only a few weeks; she is away from her parents."

"I am her guardian for the time."

"Dear prophetess, you look like a guardian, but not an earthly one. It is so slight an acquaintance; she is so young, so inexperienced. She is so—how dare *I* think of winning *her?* Every mean thing has vanished from existence; there is a new splendour on the sea, in the stars. Life is no longer a disease, but a rapture."

"You ought to say all this to her, not to me," she returned drily.

True. The Immaculate was silenced, but he had almost said what he secretly thought, that his beloved would never understand these transcendental emotions. Pale light filtered through the olive boughs on his beautiful, spiritual face. Amy, with her head resting against the rugged gray olive trunk, her face in the shadow, wondered and wondered. "Poor Rinaldo," she thought; "Poor, helpless, spell-bound knight! When will he wake and be in his right mind?"

The moon's path widened on the gleaming wave, white stars looked softly from an azure sky; some boats cuttle-fishing, with pots of fire at their prows, moved in the shallow waters close in shore, their red lustre falling weirdly over the sea and reflected upon the dusky figures standing with ready poised lances in the boats. Points of ruddy gold along the coast were towns and hamlets; massed myrtles, orange and lemon leaves threw back the moonshine like flakes of silver. He looked on this beautiful night scene for a little, she on him; then he turned to her with a smile, "You will at least wish me God speed?" he said.

"With all my heart."

"Thank you. But how shall I ever win her—one so far, far above me?"

"She is fortunate in winning such unselfish devotion," Amy returned with hardly veiled impatience. This prostration before such a worthless idol degraded him. To see him twine garlands on the ass's head was painful.

"I want you to approve my choice. Tell me

that she is not only the most beautiful, but the best, of her sex."

"My good friend, I am not in love with Lettice," she said gently.

"Nor with me, yet you seem to set me highest."

Amy passed her hand over her face. "Don't women always run one another down?" she asked acidly.

"Dearest goddess, you should be more than woman."

"Perhaps I am less."

They sat long in the solemn shadows of hoary olives, he speaking, she mostly listening. He told of his plans; arranged to prevail upon Frau von Stein to take Angela. "Why not the whole menagerie?" Amy suggested.

There was a strange peace in thus sitting and conversing for the last time, she thought. What a child her knight was, after all; like a child sitting at his mother's knee in the firelight, pouring out his small hopes and aspirations; like a child, unconsciously selfish; like a child, pitied and borne tenderly with by his confidante. Flower

scents rising on the chill sea breath, soft rustle of winds in olive, aloe and oleander boughs, mellow lustre of the ascending moon on magic sea and fairy shore, grey olive boles, torn and twisted as if by storm, and looking, in the faint filtered lights, like aged pillars in a Saxon church, sounds of each other's voices, low boom of the gentle sea; all were impressive, never forgotten.

But what was this? When they rose from the olive shadows and began the descent, Amy found the world turning wildly; her limbs gave way, she swayed, the Immaculate caught her a dead weight in his arms. Had she done this a few days earlier, well! the course of the Immaculate's true love might have been different. As it was, he was frightened to death. Still it was amongst his perfections always to do the right thing at the right moment. Therefore there was of course a flask of brandy ready in his pocket, which he applied with the utmost elegance and dexterity to her lips with one hand, while supporting her head on his shoulder with the other arm, kneeling gracefully meanwhile on one knee. It was a most affecting spectacle.

Miss Amy Langton weighed at the very least ten stone; no wonder Mr. Lester trembled beneath his lovely burden. But would he have quivered and turned so pale under ten stone of oats or potatoes? Possibly not. All night in dreams he was toiling through endless distances, Amy always stayed upon him, and always slipping through his arms down infinite descents.

When Amy woke next morning, she found the natural, but prosaic, result of a long day's wandering and romantic evening conversation in the olive shades, was a severe and very unbecoming cold in the head, of all mortal ills the least relieved by romance. If no philosopher ever endured toothache patiently, who can endure a downright, deafening, blinding, stifling catarrh with resignation? Especially who that is feminine and fair? Yet Miss Amy Langton supported her affliction with philosophy; she bore the reproaches and caresses of Frau von Stein and her strange, unhallowed potions with angelic patience, admitting that it was wrong to wander so far on the hills, of the sequel to which wandering she was silent. A gentle strife raged

between Louisa and the good Frau on the treatment proper for the patient, the latter, acting upon the principle of hitting a man when down, prescribing starvation and lowering medicines, a principle which is one more testimony to the invincible toughness of German constitutions; the former holding to the principle of picking up the fallen.

Early next morning the Immaculate called to take leave and hear what was to be done with Angela. The announcement that he was leaving the Riviera for England stirred a universal desire to take advantage of his journey. The English had letters for him to post in London, to these they added half-a-dozen parcels. The foreigners, to a woman, required needles of English manufacture in various sizes, which, perhaps, Meester Lestare would "make come" for them. The young German gentleman wanted English books and stationery, Frau Von Stein was in need of a few dozen yards of English calico, so were two or three other ladies, Fraülein Anna mentioned with some blushing that she should like some long stockings of English machine make; almost

everybody wanted Sheffield cutlery. The young Frenchman alone needed nothing from England, but if M. de Lestare should be at Paris, would he have the extreme complaisance to procure him half-a-dozen indispensable articles from the only civilised spot on the globe.

Monsieur de Lestare, with the utmost charm and complaisance, undertook all these commissions, taking the precaution to record them in his note-book.

"Tell me Liebchen," added the good Frau, knitting her brows in thought, as she addressed Amy, who was sitting in the sun, a semi-animated mass of shawls, "Is there something more I might make bring cheaply out of London?"

"You were wanting a four-post bedstead the other day, meine Beste."

"Zat could incommode him," replied the Frau, "such English bedsteads are heavy."

Lester turned to Lettice, who was reclining gracefully, sunlight and shadow enhancing her beauty, a white camellia in her hand.

"And you?" he asked, "what may I do for

you? I shall ask permission to call upon Mrs. Marshall one day."

"No; will you really?" returned Lettice with joyous surprise, "then you will take my love to them, and say how well I am looking—that is, if you think so." "But I shall certainly fall ill if I go home yet," she added with charming archness; "Be sure you say that, Mr. Lester."

"Every word of it. But I shall be seeing your nieces, Miss Langton's nieces—one is my god-daughter."

"Oh, yes. My love."

"They want somebody's love," Grace said. "They get very little from their parents."

"They are angry with them for not being boys," added Lettice. "How natural!"

The Immaculate's sensitive face quivered as if a false note had jarred.

Frau von Stein consented to receive Angela and her nurse, to the satisfaction of the majority of her guests. It was a serious matter to break the tidings to the child, and the parting was not accomplished without some diplomacy. Angela received an invitation to dine and sleep at Villa

Dolc' Acqua, which she gladly accepted, her joy dashed by the announcement that Vivian was not coming home that night. Weeping ensued, whence her mind was diverted by fairy tales and promised pictures and toys at Villa Dolc' Acqua.

"Does that woman live there?" she asked suddenly, lifting her head from her adopted father's arm.

"Which woman?"

"The cross one with yellow hair, Letty."

"It is naughty to call people cross, Angela. I hope you have not been naughty to that lady."

"I shall not go if she lives there," the child returned tranquilly.

"Will you not go to Sister Avis and Frau von Stein and Miss Amy?" he asked, lifting her head and setting her on the ground impatiently, upon which she began to cry. His heart smote him when he looked at the small figure standing before him, its chest heaving, its little fists screwed into its eyes.

"Don't cry, Carina. Look, I am going to bring you a beautiful doll when I come back. She

needs a mother, poor mite," he thought, caressing her till she smiled again.

But Angela, though pacified, was firm in her resolution not to go to the "cross woman," and only the appearance of Frau von Stein and Amy on the hotel steps cut the knot of the difficulty.

"I promise you, my little angel, you shall have nothing to do with Lettice; that young lady would go to the end of the world to leave you behind," Frau von Stein said in broken Italian. "You need not fear, Herr Lester," she added in German, "the little one will always be happy with Miss Amy. You can therefore buy my calico with a light heart, and think of your little one in a child's paradise. Farewell, my good Herr Lestare. A happy journey. *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

Angela declined to go without her father; he therefore accompanied them to the gate, where Amy turned, with the child clinging to her dress, and bid him vanish without good-bye before Angela perceived him. "Take this," she added, giving him a piece of white heather, "for good luck."

CHAPTER VII

Viola . . . . . "I'll do my best
To woo your lady—yet a barful strife,
Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife."
Twelfth Night

THE presence of a child among the boarders at Dolc' Acqua was not unattended with inconvenience. Angela's following, consisting of Perpetua, who systematically spoilt her and was ready to wage war with the universe on her behalf, and of Nep, who glared with fiery eyes and gaping jaws upon anyone who appeared to molest his little mistress, was a not altogether welcome addition to the household. A few days of rain which kept the invalids close to the house, and prevented the child and dog from playing in the garden, complicated matters, so that, what with keeping Angela from annoying the invalids and soothing her nightly grief at the non-appearance of her father, besides preserving the peace between Perpetua and the household, and

seeing that Nep was fed and kept from mischief, Amy was somewhat burdened.

"Really, Amy," said Lettice, one pouring wet afternoon, as she strolled into the dining-room, "platonic friendship is a fine thing. I wonder if Mr. Lester is as much obliged to you as he ought to be for the trouble you take with his pets."

Perpetua was sitting by the hearth in great good humour. She had been telling anecdotes of Angela's family, of Angela herself, and of Nep, who were playing at ball with Amy. The game was to keep it passing from hand to hand. Amy threw the ball, Angela missed the catch with a shriek of joy, the dog caught it with short barks of delight. Perpetua, a handsome peasant woman of forty, looked on with gleaming teeth and sparkling eyes.

"I like children and dogs," replied Amy. "Ball is great fun on a wet day. Come and try, Letty."

"Thanks," replied Lettice, shrugging her shoulders, and drawing a chair to the hearth, "I am afraid of that great dog. I wonder when Mr. Lester means to send that spoilt child to school. Perhaps he is looking for a school in England for

her. Amy, why are you so mysterious about this journey of his? You know all about it, of course."

"Oh, yes," she replied, coming to the fire with Angela, who climbed on her lap, "I know."

"But you don't mean to tell. Well, I think you might tell me in confidence. Take care, Amy, these moonlight wanderings are dangerous."

"Are they?"

"Colds are not the worst results. Amy, I really think you believe in that man with his perfections and his pretended friendship."

"Possibly. Don't you?" Did Lettice really dislike the Immaculate, or were these sharp sayings only jealousy?

"Oh, he is well enough," replied Lettice, impatiently pushing a piece of wood into the flame with her foot. "But men are never to be trusted. He is a flirt: one of the worst kind. He blinds you with his solemn talk about dry things, which he knows is the right way to your heart. He is not like others who have one manner for all. Oh, yes, Amy, he is enjoying a fine flirtation without compromising himself. If I were you I would put an end to it. He looks so desperately

good and solemn all the time. And yet in the midst of this fine talk with you he will suddenly turn and look at me: such a look! At first, before I discovered what a thorough flirt he was, I used to believe in those looks. I actually laughed one day, and wrote to Carrie that I had never seen a man so hopelessly and ridiculously smitten before. But he need not think to throw dust in my eyes. I am too well used to that sort of thing."

"Which, Letty? Being deceived or being made love to?"

"Not being deceived, certainly. You know so little of life, dear. Stewed up with your books, you have never felt what it is like to walk into a ball-room and see all the men surrender at once. You know that garrison dance last May I was telling you about? It was my first big dance. There was a huge fellow with a beard by the door who went dead white at the first glance. My card was full before he could get an introduction. You should have seen his face! He stood against the wall and eyed me all the evening; he made a dash at me at supper time, and took me down.

He proposed in the hall. Three engagements were broken off on account of me that night, and the young Wellmans, who had then been married about two months, have not been friendly since. It almost frightened me when I saw five big men standing round me and all declaring that I was engaged to dance with them at once. They were telling lies, of course. I chose the one I liked best, and just as we were starting on the waltz, up came the right man with a face like thunder, and showed his card. I promised to divide the dance between them. One man turned crimson whenever I looked at him, another stammered when he spoke to me. Oh, it was fine!"

"Really, Letty, I don't think you need accuse other people of flirting."

"Flirting? My dear, I didn't flirt; what chance had I? I simply came into the room and looked like—who was it, either the Duke of Wellington or somebody in the Bible?—who came and saw and conquered. Not that I disliked it. What girl could? Not even you, with all your learning. Wait till you have tried, and you might make a sensation in a room, if you took pains to make

the most of yourself, and took care not to open your lips and betray your cleverness and learning. See if it doesn't get into your head like champagne."

"My poor little Letty! This is a very dangerous kind of champagne."

"Stuff! You know nothing of the world, Amy; you are much more likely to get your wings singed than I am. By the way, people here have made a pretty good guess at the object of Mr. Lester's journey, and if they are right, you are not so simple as I thought."

"Well," replied Amy, taking the restless Angela once more on her knee and displaying a picture-book to her gaze, "what do people imagine the object of Mr. Lester's visit to be? To be present at the Disabilities of Women Debate?"

"Viviano mio," murmured Angela, catching her friend's name among the waste of hard English words that were so unintelligible to her, and lifting her liquid, lustrous Italian eyes from the picture-book to Amy's face with an eager, beseeching look. "He is coming back to-night? Yes, Amy?"

"Figliuola mia, not to-night, next week."

"When is next week? It is never next week," murmured the child.

"To be present at the debate? Naturally that was part of it. Ah! that was a fine stroke on the part of our Viviano, as Angela calls him. He knows the way to your heart, dear. The delicacy of the stroke! Fancy that humbug standing up before them all, the story teller, and declaring that he had come to vote against the Bill for removing Disabilities, but that what he had heard in the honourable member for Slowcombe's speech had induced him to support it."

"So you read Mr. Lester's speech? I thought, Letty, you never looked at newspapers, much less debates."

"Neither did I; I only listened to Mr. Browne, who was talking to Louisa about it. 'Ah,' Mr. Browne said, 'I know what self-deceivers we are, at least the masculine portion of us, and I could not help thinking that had our friend, the member for Dalesby, more strictly analysed his reasons for changing his opinion about Female Disabilities, he would have been obliged to confess that the

society of a charming and very learned lady in the Riviera had a great deal to do with it. I assure you, Miss Stanley,' he added, 'that no one at Col Aprico would be surprised at receiving interesting intelligence about a certain lady doctor and a certain honourable member.' "

"Mr. Browne said that!" cried Amy, "Miserable old gossip! Hateful old donkey! Let him go about in petticoats and take to working cross-stitch! The chaplain is the faithful reflection of the gossip of the community," she added, making sparks fly from logs on the hearth.

"Just so; dear child. Can you wonder now that people suppose Mr. Lester's visit to have reference to matrimony?"

"Stuff! By the way, Lettice, what did Mr. Browne think of Mr. Lester's speech?"

"Whose? Oh, Bayard's, of course. He said it was very good; he admires his speaking. What was it he said? Oh, I know, 'his ready eloquence often makes us forget his want of logic,' that was it."

"Mr. Browne is right; he is not logical, he is eloquent. His imagination is stronger than his reason."

"Now confess, Amy," continued Lettice, "the object of his visit is matrimonial. Aha, Dr. Amy! we know all about the olive-yard, where two people were seen sitting on a bench in the moon-light, who knows for how long? I wonder what kind of conversation is likely to be held under olive trees in moon-light?"

"It depends on who the people are. Who saw us?" asked Amy, reddening.

"Oh, my dear, these little things are not so easily hidden from the vulgar gaze as you think. Somebody saw."

Amy was tired of Lettice's perpetual teasing about the Immaculate; besides, a dim suspicion had lately been increasing within her that Lettice did not care for him, so she thought she would end the teasing and decide her doubt at once.

"Well!" she replied, "then I had better tell you, in strict confidence. Mr. Lester does contemplate marriage, and is gone to England on that account."

"Ah!" cried Lettice, turning pale, and stooping to adjust the burning wood, "this, then, is the meaning of platonic friendship! Well, Amy, you might have been more open. So it is to end in

this way, after all. Oh, how false! What a flirt! What a humbug! Of course your people will consent; they'll jump at him, and you will be married like other people, just—just as if you had never been a doctor. Carrying off such a catch, too!"

"I?" returned Amy, almost regretting her words when she saw Lettice's discomposure, "I am not going to be married. I was speaking of Mr. Lester. But keep my secret, Letty. I told you in strictest confidence, remember."

"He is not engaged to you?" exclaimed Lettice, turning from pale to red, "and yet he thinks of marrying?"

"This is a secret, remember. Not a soul knows. How foolish I was to tell you."

"Who is the girl, dear? Tell me, oh, do tell me, there's a darling!" cried Lettice, hiding her face in Amy's dress. "I know I am horrid to you. I worry you to death, but I promise you to be so nice if you will only tell me. Is it—Louisa? Is it that horrid Löttchen Römer?"

"My little Letty, I can't tell you; I'm sworn to secrecy."

"Oh! you must, you must, you shall!" cried Lettice, passionately, her face still buried. "Is she pretty?"

"H'm, yes. Everybody says so."

"I don't believe it; I am sure he has no taste. Oh! tell me, she has a great fortune, he wants money."

"She has little, if anything, I believe; besides, he does not want money."

"Oh, what a story! You always told me he was poor."

"So he is; poor for his position."

"A landed gentleman of good family," murmured Lettice. "The county will visit her. She will go to Court. She will have a town house, no doubt. Well, if he is poor, it is not much of a marriage. You told me Croft Hall is a ramshackle old house, and with very little land. When I marry, I shall marry into the peerage, and take care that there is money."

"I would, if I were you, Letty. While you are about it, you may as well aim high. But I hope you will marry a good man. If you love him, you will not care about his position or money."

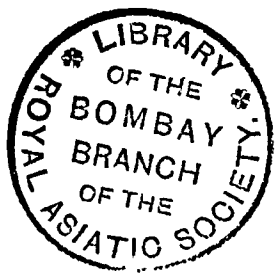
Something like a sob came from the hidden golden head. "Tell me, Amy," she murmured "is he much in love with her?"

"Over head and ears. Bewitched."

"It's a shame! She's a horrid thing, hideous and stupid. Some gaunt, grim, learned creature, with red hair and spectacles! I always thought him a fool, a prig, and a flirt. Now I know it. I hate the wretch!"

She raised her flushed face from her friend's shoulder, sprang up, stamped, and rushed out of the room, crying with all her might.

"At all events," mused Amy, as she stroked Angela's glossy curls, "she loves him as much as she can. They may be happy after all. He will see no fault in her. Poor Lettice! at least she loves him."



CHAPTER VIII

"You are a thousand times a properer man
Than she a woman—
But, mistress, know yourself; down on your knees
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love."
As You Like It

"È GIÀ la settimana prossima?" little Angela asked of Amy as usual, when she went to her in the morning to say her prayers, "Amy, will it never be next week?"

"Next week at last. He will come to-day, carissima mia."

"Oggì, gran Dio! Oh! Amy, oggì. Will he come to breakfast? Oh, I shall die, I shall die!"

"Are you so glad to leave me? You know you will go back to the hotel when he comes."

"No, I won't. Viviano shall live with the Frau, or else you shall live with us and Nep. We will have maccaroni for dinner every day. Amy, do you love him?"

"Picciolina mia! Come to breakfast."

The child was beside herself; she ate no breakfast; then she fidgetted about till she knocked against Lettice and dashed her cup out of her hand, sending the black, scalding coffee all over her new spring costume. This was too much for Lettice; she turned with an angry cry and gave the child a sounding box on the ear. Angela stood for a moment, dizzy, half-stunned with the blow, which made Lettice's hand tingle; then, with a shrill scream, she sprang at her like a wild cat. Sister Avis pulled her off with considerable difficulty, and carried her out, kicking and struggling, into the verandah, where she laid her down on the cool pavement.

"That child is a perfect demon!" cried Lettice, crimson with rage and pain. "Look here!" Rolling up her sleeve, she showed a ring of little red indentations in the cream-white arm. "She almost made her teeth meet."

"I wish she had," Grace replied hotly. "Venting your wicked temper on a poor little child!"

"Ach! That was not well done, my Lettchen," said the good Frau, looking at her favourite's arm and then at the frantic child on the ground;

"*Ze* little was never beat yet, and Italian blood is warm."

Lettice went away, injured and in high dudgeon in spite of some twinges of conscience, thinking to make it up to Angela with sweets and toys some day. The child screamed till she became rigid and black in the face. Sister Avis then picked her up exhausted, and carried her out to look at the flowers and see the pigeons fed. There they met Amy, rather pale and with her hand tied up, Nep following her, his tail between his legs.

"The dog has bitten you?" cried Grace. She had heard Nep's growl when Angela was struck, and had seen Amy run out on the verandah and catch him by the collar, as he was about to rush into the breakfast-room.

"I was obliged to beat him," Amy said. "I am the only person in the house who can master him."

"He might have killed Lettice," said Sister Avis, "he would have had her by the throat the next moment."

"Don't say anything. Fortunately Perpetua was not there."

The bite was not severe, though the skin was broken; but the sisters thought it well to keep both dog and child out of Lettice's way for a time. They strolled up the hill path, carrying Angela by turns, while Nep slunk behind with an ominous red glare in his eyes and a confused sense of wrong in his canine brain, knowing that he had been beaten for trying to do his duty. Presently they came to a warm niche in the rocks, carpeted with violets and redolent of thyme; here they rested, Angela lying quiet on the ground, with the dog, also quiet, crouching beside her.

When Sister Avis looked at the deep sapphire sea in the bright morning sunshine, she did not want to die; life seemed so lovely, so full of possibilities.

"How we shall miss the sea," she said. "It was mistaken kindness to bring me here. I shall have the fight to subdue my worldly affections all over again."

"Take your freedom, Grace; live a natural life. Leave what you have no vocation for."

"When you renounce your chosen vocation it will be time for me to think of doing the same;

not before," her sister replied, rising and taking the child again.

Little Angela soon forgot her injuries and her passion, but Nep slunk about with a trailing tail, red eyes and a beaten look, all day, avoided by the household, who heard that he had bitten Amy.

"I am glad I didn't see it," was Lettice's comment on the incident, "I should certainly have fainted."

In the afternoon, when it was growing chill, several of the Dolc' Acqua family were sitting in the garden, with Angela playing close by; Lettice was hovering about discontentedly, wanting to talk to Amy, who was reading, but restrained by fear of Angela and Nep, who were making a barrier to her.

Presently quick, light footsteps were heard approaching, and the Immaculate himself appeared from round a corner hidden by some shrubs, having come softly to surprise Angela—so he told himself—whom he had seen from a distance through a glass. But it was not easy to surprise her, she heard and recognised the step almost as soon as the dog did,

and flew to him with a cry of joy. He caught her up, kissed her, and was going to set her down again; but the small arms were too tightly clasped about his neck. "Angiolina mia, what is the matter?" he asked. The little girl was crying, and clinging to him, while Nep whined, barked and sprang into the air in a manner that prevented the Immaculate from doing his proper devoir to the ladies present. De Rolleau said something about family joys and *l' art d'être père.* Lettice, standing apart, contemplated this effusive meeting with profound scorn. "A nice family," she thought; "they both bite."

After all the blameless knight was human, and to be human is to have moments of unreason. That is probably why M. de Lestare, ecstatically received by the child, the dog, and M. de Rolleau of Paris, was chilled and disappointed at evoking no display of enthusiasm from the Misses Marshall and Langton. Could he expect these ladies to throw themselves into his arms *en masse?*

"How are you? Had you a pleasant journey? What an age since you left. When did you leave England?" ought surely to content an ordinary

mortal; but perhaps the Immaculate was not an ordinary mortal. He said and did all the proper things in the most proper manner, as soon as he was disembarrassed from Angela and had set her down with an injunction to go and play.

"The white heather brought me good luck," he said presently to Amy, who was again absorbed in her book at the farthest end of the sheltered nook, not unobserved by Lettice, whose eyes shot a green glitter in that direction, her mouth still scornfully set.

"Yes? I am very glad," she replied, looking up a moment, without so much as a kind smile, and again perusing the page in her hand. He turned away chilled.

Lettice, leaning on the bough of a tree a few paces off, looked away at the sun-lit sea, apparently quite unconcerned by the return of the faultless knight; Fraülein Lottchen hoped he had executed all his commissions and amused himself highly without spoiling his health. He answered at random, annihilated by the fact that Lettice did not care what he had done during his absence. Fraülein Anna's

stockings were exceedingly civil and hospitable; he had paid considerable duty at the Custom House for bringing over the Langtons; he had discovered the Frenchman's neckties in a hotel at Paris, and dined with them. Mr. Steven Langton was among his luggage at the Montone d'Oro. Yes, he had delivered all the letters and posted the messages. The Cecil Langtons were most expensive; their little daughters much overweight."

"We all read your speech on Female Disabilities, Mr. Lester," Louisa said kindly, "even Lettice read that."

"Ah," his face lighted up at last, as he flashed a glance at Lettice; she was an embodiment of immovable indifference.

"And so you changed your mind?" continued Louisa. "We have hopes that you may yet become reasonable on the Woman question. Won't you come in? You will find Frau von Stein at home; she will be so glad to hear that her calicoes have arrived."

"Such a pity to go in yet; just as the sun is setting. Miss Marshall, I have many messages

and parcels for you. I have been seeing your people."

He had turned and approached her with a diffident air, as he spoke, looking as beautiful and as melancholy as a strayed angel, and quite as good.

"Flirt!" Lettice thought. "Thank you" she said, "I had a letter from home this morning"; which was an invention.

Then Angela spoke for the first time, as her guardian gently disengaged her arms for the third or fourth time. "You will never, never go away again, Carissimo mio?"

"Why, why, what about the lovely big doll I was to bring?" he returned.

"I don't want dolls, I want you," she replied, lifting her large, dark eyes to his face and smiling. Then they told him of her excitement at the prospect of his return, and her daily longings and enquiries for him, while she prattled on in her liquid Italian, her arms outspread, her sweet flower-face uplifted. The Immaculate's heart was not of stone; he was obliged to catch the tiny creature up and embrace her. "You shall

never leave me, my pretty bird, never. There, there! Now run and play. Are all little girls like this?" he asked in English.

"Not all," Louisa said impressively.

"Certainly not," Lettice interjected, "this is an unusually savage specimen. She bites."

"Bites?" he echoed, glancing at Amy's hand. "Surely she did not bite you, Miss Amy?"

"No, Angela bit me, your other pet bit Amy," Lettice returned.

"Oh!—Miss Marshall! Surely, surely not! Oh, I hope she did not really hurt you."

"It was nothing. Just a red ring on my arm. There is no danger. A dog's bite is worse," she replied, while Angela began to cry bitterly.

"Poor old Nep, of course he must be killed," said his master; "but Angela! *she* bit *you?*"

"What a shame to tell on the child!" cried Fraülein Anna, "at least tell all the history, Lettchen."

"Oh, I didn't mind the bite and I must confess that I boxed her ears," answered Lettice, laughing. "Don't punish her, Mr. Lester, please, please."

The Immaculate looked grave, as who would not. "The dog must at all events be killed," he said, while the great generous creature leapt round him and fawned.

"Indeed he shall not," cried Amy. "Poor dog, he only did his duty."

"In biting you, dear prophetess?"

"Certainly. He saw Angela struck; he rushed to help her; I pulled him back. He naturally bit me. Then I had to beat him. Poor, dear, old Nep!"

"But I can't keep a dog that bites."

"Give me the dog then?" Amy entreated. "He shan't be killed."

"Come Angela," Louisa said, "where are the flowers you were going to give Mr. Lester? Fraülein Anna, we poor wretches must go in out of the chill."

In the general move, Lettice, singing softly in very bad German, "Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten," moved languidly in the opposite direction to that taken by the others, through an alley shaded by a now leafless *pergola*. The Immaculate, torn by conflicting emotions, but

still looking as beautiful as the day, remained rooted to the ground, half-way between the battalion going homeward and the slight figure moving through the alley. Angela was too much bent on gathering flowers for the Immaculate to observe his absence; she danced joyously on, singing and stooping to pick carnations, until it began to grow dark and she found herself back at the house. Then discovering his absence she began to cry piteously, whereupon the dog sympathised by opening his jaws in a long-drawn howl of inconceivable melancholy, that alarmed the house.

Alas! poor faultless knight, left in the meanwhile gazing distractedly after the fair damsel disappearing in the dusk of the alley! He rumpled his hair,—with the utmost grace; he smote his breast—with elegance; he wished he had never been born—but in the most decorous manner, without any swear-words or unbecoming gestures. What had he done to offend her? Then, as became a gallant knight, he resolved to do his devoir even though it slew him, and cast himself prostrate at the feet of his lady, avowing

his devotion in the nicest words to be found in the dictionary.

"Ich glaube die Wellen verschlingen," sang Lettice of the golden locks, pacing the slow time of the melody with fairy steps, as she issued from the dusk alley into bright sunset glow on a green slope, shadowed by murmuring pines. Just then she turned with slow nonchalance to face the agitated knight pursuing her swiftly through the alley.

"Not gone in, Mr. Lester? Best out here, isn't it?"

"It is divine. Miss Marshall, I—ah!—I called on your father—I went on purpose—"

"Really? I thought you scarcely knew him."

"I love you, Lettice—I loved you from the first."

So the Immaculate began. No doubt he continued with equal propriety. The scene must have been a charming one, especially suited to the lyric stage, between a tenor and soprano. Picture the despair, the yearning, the pleading of the tenor. The response of the soprano on upper C, the roulades and trills bringing her down to

lower B. Her staccato coquetry gliding on to the middle voice; then a melodious relenting; then the duo allegro affettuoso!

"Ha! our good Lestare!" cried Frau von Stein, later. "He is returned. What a joy! And my calico, my needles, my shears? I am almost sorry, liebe Aimèe, that I did not let him bring the post bedstead. Such bedsteads last one's lifelong. Our good Lestare has been here and did not come in? Hein!"

But what is this in the rays of the rising moon? Two figures walking slowly, slowly, and close, oh, so close, together. Lettice's face, spiritualised in the moon light, was lifted, half-tenderly, half-bashfully, to Lester's dark one, bent down with an almost religious fervour on her's. The brilliant allegro movement for two voices in C major had been sung, with shakes, cadenzas, and flitting solos, the tenor C in alt, the soprano F sharp, to what joyous orchestral tumult! roll of drums here, pearling of flutes there, and always the human cry of violins and 'cellos beneath. Fortissimo! Tutti! Curtain!

"Ach! Aimèe! But no, never," cried Frau

von Stein. "Du meine Gute! Ach! this Lettchen! No never was something so beautiful. Doch! Doch! Can that be possible? These English! Doch! Ach Gott!" she added with deep emotion; "that is indeed bride and bride-groom. Du lieber Himmel! So walked I with my blessed Karl in the old sweet days.

'Ach, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe,
Die schöne Zeit der jungen Liebe.'"

Then the Immaculate, pale and more solemn than ever, said in his sweet voice, the two simple words, "*Meine Braut.*"

CHAPTER IX

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact :—
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—
That is the madman, the lover all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.

"YOU are not glad?" Lester asked Amy, while Frau von Stein exhausted her enthusiasm in embracing Lettice and congratulating her in a curious and excited mingling of English and German.

"I am glad," she replied.

"You don't seem glad," he added with a wistful look.

She laughed a forced laugh. "I am a true Briton, and give my thoughts no tongue. Besides, it is no surprise to me, and I have not just won a bright and beauteous bride."

"Do you wish us joy?"

"With all my heart."

The Immaculate was chilled. He could not

be perfectly happy without sympathy. None but Amy Langton could properly share his feelings. Why had she turned to ice? Poor dear perfect knight! Angela had sprung into his arms, she pressed the flowers she had gathered for him against his face, chatting away in her musical Italian, like a little bird. He clasped her closer and kissed her tenderly. Here was sympathy at last. And who should rejoice if not this motherless child, about to know a second mother? It was then that the enthusiastic Frau, having set Lettice free, descended like a benevolent avalanche upon the Immaculate, folding him and the child in her extensive embrace, and half-stifling him. Being engaged is not all moonlight strolls, poetic raptures, soft whispers beneath lemon-scented blossoms, he discovered. Hapless knight!

"Ach! my good Herr Lestare, I joy me so," she cried, in English, used for the benefit of Lettice, "zat my Lettchen should be your bride!—you her bridegroom! No; zat is too beautiful! I congratulate tousand, tousand time. And my linen zat you have brought with, and ze

needles; would to Heaven zat I had also let bring ze post bedstead! And you shall be married together soon, yes? And I must have you for supper to-night. No, you shall not dream of going back to ze hot-hell to eat. It is your betrothal, your Braut-nacht. We will drink Hochheimer and push glasses. Yes? And ze little, ze Angela, she will have a mutter now. Ach! my little, you shall have cakes. Ze supper is brought up. Come in."

The unresisting "bridegroom" and "bride" were accordingly led, one in each of the Frau's kind hands, into the dining-room, where her family were already gathered for the evening meal.

"My ladies and gentlemen," said Frau von Stein with a beaming face, to the horror of the Immaculate. "Permit that I introduce you to Herr Vivian Lestare and Fraülein Lettice Marshall, betrothed."

Then it was that Lester found his devotion to the fair creature by his side put to a severe test. All the ladies precipitated themselves *en masse* upon poor little blushing Lettice, and over-

whelmed her with kisses and congratulations; the men shook hands with her, and wished her joy; the ladies also shook hands with the bridegroom, wishing him joy. Then von Wilden, without the slightest warning, clasped him in a fraternal embrace and kissed him on both cheeks.

The Immaculate did not swoon, neither did he swear; but the native Briton rose in revolt within him. He blushed deeply and darkly, but kept his dignity. "Don't be such an ass, von Wilden," he grumbled, with indignation not loud but deep, freeing himself from the friendly German's arms, only to fall into those of de Rolleau, whose ignorance of English made Lester's remark unintelligible to him, and who therefore kissed him with effusion, to the immeasurable delight and amusement of his compatriots.

Hapless knight! But one glance at sweet, blushing Lettice atoned for the Franco-German caresses; he accepted the calmer congratulations of the Swede and the Dane, men whom he knew but slightly, with proper gravity and resignation.

O wert thou in the cauld blast,
On yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee.

And what are storm, misery, death itself, in comparison with being publicly kissed by a von Wilden and a de Rolleau?

But at last they went to table, and acted like ordinary, civilised, hungry humanity, until the hock went round, when the whole company again lost their reason, rose *en masse*, surrounded the Brautpaar, and clinked glasses excitedly against those of the newly-betrothed with fine disregard of consequences.

"What on earth will they do next?" the Immaculate wondered, meekly removing the spilt wine from his clothes with a serviette. The next thing was for von Wilden to spring upon his chair and begin to sing, "Wohl auf! nun getrunken den funkelnden Wein," in which they all joined in parts. Lester looked at the exquisite face at his side, more lovely than ever in its smiles and blushes, and when she lifted her clear grey eyes, smiling at him as if they two were alone together, the old glamour descended upon

him, he forgot the whole world. But, alas! not for long.

Fraülein Anna wished to know if Herr Lestare had hunted the fox and eaten anything besides beefsteaks during his English visit. He had not shot the fox, but had had a splendid run of fifty minutes. He could not tell if the fox had been finally killed; having been cannoned into a brook, he was not in at the death. "Fifty minutes to catch one leettel fox! Du meine Güte! And such a fall! Herr Lester would hunt no more? Ach Himmel! these mad English. They have only two amusements; one for fine days, when they say 'We will kill something'; and one for bad days, when they say 'We will kill ourselves.' It is done in fast trains, on jumping horses, steeple-hunts, and the boxe. Then, when the November fogs come, they all hang themselves."

"It is well arranged," de Rolleau said, stroking his beautiful waxed moustache, "Without this passion for killing themselves, how would the English keep down their overflowing population? The Frenchman, on the contrary, a rarer, nobler being, chooses amusements that preserve life."

"That was well said, my friend," added von Wilden, "everything in Nature evolves from itself what it needs for the purpose of sustaining individual and generic existence. Thus the Englishman, finding in himself a tendency to increase in number beyond the capacity of his foggy island to feed him, evolves an instinct of self-destruction; while the Frenchman, fearing lest he should, as is very probable, ultimately become extinct, preserves his own life with the greatest care, and develops a tendency to destroy the national as well as the individual life of others. But will this struggle for existence be crowned with success? Science informs us that such struggles result in the survival of the fittest. Therefore——"

"Ha!" cried de Rolleau, with difficulty following von Wilden's labyrinthine and nasal French, "You will insult France, von Wilden? And I present? I ask the ladies' pardon."

"Ach! you are making mistakes again, my children," cried Frau von Stein. "M. de Rolleau knows that Herr von Wilden regards France as

the foremost nation in the universe. Yes? Herr von Wilden?"

M. de Rolleau's moustache bristled, his eyes glittered.

"Pardon, de Rolleau; I regard France as the first nation in the world," replied von Wilden in French, "in vanity," he added in his native tongue, understood by the majority of the party, but not by the Frenchman, who had mastered no language but his own, obviously the only one worth mastering.

De Rolleau bowed, smiled, twisted his spiky moustache, and said that he cherished an unalterable friendship for M. de Wilden. Von Wilden replied that M. de Rolleau enjoyed his highest esteem.

"Vanity," he added, "is a property inherent to the stupid; its object is to prevent them being crushed by the consciousness of their inferiority and to rouse their aggressiveness against those who despise them. It is like the thorns upon certain plants in an early stage of growth, which serve to defend them from the attacks of browsing cattle."

"Très bien! très bien!" said de Rolleau, smiling. "M. de Wilden speaks always in philosopher."

There was mischief in von Wilden's eye, the gleam of battle in de Rolleau's; the Swede and Dane began to put in their oars.

"Come," cried the good hostess, "we will see what our good Herr Lestare has brought us from England. Men have brought the things."

The vestibule was piled with parcels; two hot men with trucks stood wiping their faces at the door. The ladies hailed their parcels with loud and voluble delight, de Rolleau was affected to tears by the sight of his Parisian neckties. Ah! why was Paris so cold in winter? mused the exile from the only habitable spot on earth. Von Wilden was very critical over his books and very exact in paying for them; when the Immaculate said, "Hang the odd shillings!" he thought what a pity it was not to let this rich Englishman pay the whole score.

"What *is* the matter with you? We seem to be strangers all at once," the Immaculate asked Amy, whose reception of a Parisian trinket he

brought her as a souvenir had been somewhat chilling. "You reject this wretched thing with scorn?"

"Not scorn."

"In short you reject it. Very well!"

Then to Amy's surprise, the courteous and chivalrous Lester dashed the morocco case to the ground, and turned angrily away.

"I wonder why on earth I am such a fool," she mused. "Is it because I have made the Immaculate Mr. Lester angry?" The vestibule was now empty; she sat alone under the swinging lamp on the stairs and looked at the jeweller's case, which had sprung open and shot the bracelet out upon the pavement, where it glittered in the lamp-light. She could not bear to see it there, ready to be trampled on by the first passer; yet she had not the resolution to pick it up.

"I would not have it because I care too much for him," she thought, "and it is best so. I am glad he was angry. He ought not to have been angry; it was unkind. I wish I had taken it quietly. I am glad I didn't; I am glad he brought it. It was most impertinent of him.

Sometimes I think I hate him. We always differed and disagreed, and now we have come to the hating point. No doubt I hate him, therefore I dislike to meet him, and therefore I will never meet him again. He does not hate me; he only disapproves of me. As if it mattered."

Did Lettice really care for Lester? How lovely beyond her lovely wont she looked that night with the flush of happiness and bashful tenderness upon her.

"Ah! great and glorious power of beauty!" Amy thought, quite unconscious of her own, and almost envious of Lettice Marshall's. "Still, if only she loves him. I think Letty loves him."

So Frau von Stein and her pensionnaires thought, when they observed the blushing and sparkling of the pretty face that fascinated them all. A beautiful poetic marriage, all love on both sides, all—except the Dane, who was smitten himself—thought, with quiet elation. This betrothal was the most delightful, cheering thing that had ever happened at Villa Dolc' Acqua; it brought an atmosphere of love and

romance, youth and poetry, into the limited, stagnant, invalid circle.

Something more than a conviction that she was going to make a suitable match, and an exultant feeling that she was leading captive a man who, in position, mind, and person, was all that a girl could desire, inspired Lettice. She really loved this man, though she loved herself better. Of the first clause Lester was assured, of the possibility of the latter he could not dream. Lettice was to him a celestial vision, a flawless being; she was indeed not Lettice at all, but an impossible creation of his own imagination.

This dreamer walked home in his dream beneath the stars, listening to the hushed song of the unseen sea, and the faint whisper of the night wind among boughs of myrtle and lemon, with a look of supernatural exaltation on his face. He had not gone far when he turned and looked back. Lights were not out at Villa Dolc' Acqua. *That* was Lettice's window. Perhaps she was at her evening devotions,—overpowering thought! How dare he be present

even in imagination at that holy rite? Yet she was probably praying for him, unworthy him! Sweet, sweet Lettice, pure pearl of stainless womanhood! And he had dared to raise his thoughts to that height, nay, more, he had actually been accepted there. She had stooped to him, even him! The light went out. The golden head now pressed the pillow. "Happy slumber, rosy visions, sweetest and purest!"

He turned homewards, thinking of the evening's comedy, while striking a light for his cigar. Von Wilden had excelled himself on the piano. Then there had been *tableaux vivants*. Once, happily seated by Lettice, Lester glanced across the room. There sat Amy Langton, looking very pale and tired, quite unlike herself, her head resting against an inlaid cabinet, her hand bandaged, the dog's head on her knee. He had forgotten the bite; he had not even learnt if it were serious. The picture was distressing, a jarring chord. But Lettice spoke; it was forgotten in a moment. Now it rose again, to be again dismissed in the exquisite tumult that fair vision evoked.

His face was exalted and spiritualised, his eyes

brilliant; he was like an enchanted hero of old romance, seeing visions unutterable. He might wake at any moment from the magic trance; but he could never escape the fate to which he had bound himself under the spell.

Lettice was considering her wedding clothes, how many bridesmaids she would have, and what they should wear.

"Die Wahn ist kurz, die Reu ist lang."

CHAPTER X

"Wenn du sie im Zorn ertappen könntest, da wäre sie am besten kennen zu lernen; da springt der versteckte inwendige Mensch heraus—" "Barfüssele."

NEXT morning the Immaculate took Angela and the dog to Villa Dolc' Acqua; the child chattered as much as usual, but received fewer replies. Her guardian was thinking of other things; he was no longer so much pleased and amused by her pretty ways and caresses; he was beginning to think children on the whole rather a nuisance. Some dim suspicion of this was quickly manifest to Angela's observant mind. Receiving no answer to a five times repeated question, she looked in her guardian's face with the dumb pathos of a slighted dog and sighed dejectedly, relapsing into spiritless silence. Could this be her Viviano, or had some wicked witch conjured his soul out of his body?—an event of probable daily occurrence. Was Frau von Stein a witch?

Perpetua said she was a heretic, a heretic was probably as bad as a witch. What was the good of asking Viviano when his soul was gone away? She clasped the big doll from England closer, kissed a little more paint off its cheeks, and asked it instead, producing no change in its glassy stare and fixed red smile.

They met Frau von Stein coming from her poultry-yard with some eggs in her apron and a large straw hat over her morning cap.

"Frau," asked Angela solemnly. "Is a heretic a witch? Are you a witch?"

"Du lieber Himmel! no; that is the witch," she cried, laughing and pointing to Lettice, who was innocent of any language but her own, and some wild fragments of French.

"Has she stolen Viviano's soul?" she continued anxiously.

"Ha! ha! Herr Lester, do you hear ze little? She would make a wit, she would poke a fun at you!" cried the delighted Frau in English. "Yes," she added in Italian, "the witch, Lettchen, has stolen away his soul."

"There are no witches except in stories,

Angela," Lester replied. "It is dangerous to jest with this child, Frau von Stein. She's so sharp."

"People don't know when they are bewitched," observed Angela, submitting to the caresses of von Wilden and the ladies on the verandah, but slipping quickly past Lettice, who called her to her side with a smile. She went unwillingly, almost fearfully, suffered Lettice to kiss her averted cheek, and wriggled quickly away.

"This is naughty, rude behaviour, Angela," her guardian said. "Go, carissima, and kiss the lady and say good-morning in your best Englsh."

"I don't like her," moaned the child. "She beat me—hard."

"This is naughtier and naughtier. You know that you deserved it. Oh, yes, I heard all your naughtiness."

"Pardon, Herr Lestare, ze little tells true. Ach! Lettchen," she began, lapsing into German, "you know you struck first and hard; then she bit you," said Frau von Stein. "Our Lettchen has her quick blood, who is worth anything without that?. The child danced and fell against her, and the hot coffee stained her dress and burnt her arm.

And Lettchen, you swung your hand round hard, hard,—the dog saw and would have killed you, but our brave Amy caught him by the throat. Then this naughty, naughty Angela became like a mad child and bit the lady."

"She struck hard," sobbed the child, gathering from this speech that her misdeed was referred to, and creeping up to him to be comforted.

The Immaculate said nothing in any tongue, but he thought in three. Lettice had vented her anger upon a helpless child; she had misrepresented her violence to the child's detriment. Lettice was sitting smiling unconsciously by his side, looking like a young angel. When she observed the change on his face, concluding that he was angry with Angela, some compunction made her draw the little girl towards her. But Lester suddenly snatched Angela away and set her on the other side of him.

"My Lettchen," said the good Frau in English, "ze little is scolded, while she did bite; please tell to our good Herr Lestare ze trute."

"Oh," said Lettice, with her sweet smile; "don't scold the dear child, pray; it had better

be forgotten. She was very naughty; I was a little sharp with her."

"Why did you strike her?" he asked in a tone that chilled her.

"Well, since you must know the whole history," she replied, "Angela was naughty——"

"Ach! not naughty, she did eat nozing for joy of Herr Lester's return," interrupted Frau von Stein, "she was agitate——"

"Well, she was frisking about and knocked a cup of scalding coffee over me. Before I knew what I was about I had given her a little slap on the side of her face——"

"Ach! my Lettchen, it was greater as you did sink. Her ear and sheek was red like blode; she did wank, she did stagger, and zen she did jump at you."

"Yes; then she sprang at me — I was so frightened—and nearly made her teeth meet in my arm."

"I am very sorry. I am more sorry than I can say. Is the wound healing?" he asked.

"Wound? Oh, the mark soon went," Lettice laughed.

"And the dog?"

"The dog? What did he do? Something dreadful, I believe; but I was too much occupied with this little fury to see," replied Lettice, laughing.

"*Ze* dogue?" said the good Frau. "Ach Gott! *zat* could have been tragic. When he see *ze* little beat, he spring out from *ze* verandah, with fire eyes and growls like sunder. Amy in one minute she has her hand on *ze* great black troat, *zen zere* is a fight—du meine Güte! a fight with maiden and dogue. Von Wilden, he is *zere* soon to help, but not until *ze* beast did bite *ze* maiden. Herr von Wilden blinded *ze* beast, and Miss Amy—I know not what she has done, but *ze* dogue is her servant."

"I am glad I didn't see it," added Lettice, with a shiver, "I should have fainted."

"The dog might have killed you," Lester said with emotion. "Poor little thing!" he added, in Italian. "If you are naughty, you must expect to be beaten, Angela."

"Father never, never beat me," whimpered Angela.

"Ach! das Waisekind. Herr Lester, never, never must you beat zis shild. It will have only kindness," commented Frau von Stein.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," said Lettice, in her musical voice. "She is already ruined by over-indulgence."

"I love not your philosophy, Miss Marshall," remarked von Wilden, who had been sitting silently in the sunshine, with a philosophical German book, containing sentences two pages long, interminable mazes, with the verb at the very end. While enjoying this mental relaxation, he broke off occasionally to meditate upon the possibility of excluding the perception of space from the consciousness of infinity, and the probability of the on-the-point of being, or *werdende*, having no continuity of essence with the being, or *geworden*. While revolving these airy trifles, his solid Teutonic brain was further occupied with the study of humanity in the concrete, in the specimens before him on the verandah.

"I do not hold," he continued, "that the young human intelligence can be well developed by the principles of pain, terror, and disgrace, all of which

degrade the consciousness and lower the dignity of humanity, and all of which should be reduced as much as possible to a minimum in the common consciousness of the race. Let us, therefore, abolish punishment in the family and rear human beings uncontaminated by fear and pain, when we may safely abolish it in the State. How are beautiful forms and colours developed, and ugly or useless organs lost, in the natural and gradual process of evolution? The ugly and the useless dwindle by disuse and become extinct; the beautiful or useful—and these terms are often synonymous—on the contrary, develop themselves by constant use."

Soaring into regions of inpalpable ratiocination, he traced the development of a newt's foot into the human hand. "So," he continued," we shall follow Nature in the artificial process of developing an ideal *Mensch* from the rudimentary being"—bestowing a prickly-bearded kiss upon the rose-leaf surface of Angela's cheek—"before us. We will cause her to lose, by disuse, fear and its accompanying degradation, and to develop to the utmost the opposite principle—

love, and all the elevating virtues of humanity which spring from this one, so beautiful root." He maintained further that the civilisation of different periods could be ascertained by an enquiry into their views of a supreme ruling power, or powers. Was the great First Cause worshipped in terror, with propitiatory rites, as a willing inflictor of misery, then were the worshippers very low in the scale. Was the Supreme Ruler, on the contrary, revered and trusted as a beneficent being, incapable of cruelty, then had the worshippers reached a high point.

Whereupon the Immaculate was bound to reply; the original subject of discussion became gradually lost sight of; literally playing at hide-and-seek behind the trees with Nep, metaphorically circling the globe. Lettice listened with her gentle air of appreciation, and laughed her musical laugh occasionally, quite unconscious of what was being said in laboured English. She was wondering if satin would still be worn by brides in a year's time, when she was to be married. Von Wilden spoke English grammatically, with idioms borrowed from every language he knew,

and they were numerous. He habitually addressed Lester as "young fellow" and "you rascal," under the impression that it was usual to do so. He gave vigour to his conversation by such expressions as "Zounds," "Odd's my life," "Crikey," "Damme." Again, he would address the Immaculate as "old cuss," or "old hoss;" these expressions, picked up from a smart American youth, were his favourites. If Lester ventured to hint that these terms were not heard in the best English, von Wilden, reflecting that the Immaculate was not noble, concluded that he was most likely unacquainted with the aristocratic use of the language.

The sunshiny morning having slipped imperceptibly away, Lester, promising to appear at the evening's reception, took his leave. How different to yesterday's poetic exultation was to-day's dejection! The serpent had appeared early in this Eden. Angela trotted happily along, telling her companion a long, unintelligible history, not entirely founded on fact, about Nep, Perpetua, Amy, and Sister Avis, when a cry and rush from the child, a bound and whine from the dog,

heralded Amy Langton's appearance round a turn in the pillared drive.

"How is the hand?" the Immaculate asked. "Let me see it, pray. Are you quite sure that it is not serious?—have you had it cauterized?" he continued with profound solemnity.

She ungloved a pinky-white hand, the back torn in two or three places, already healing. The sight produced a dismal howl and drooping tail from Nep, who slunk away, looking like a limp roll of black fur, and crouched behind a pillar, showing nothing but the whites of his eyes.

"Thank God, it is no worse," exclaimed Lester fervently. "How brave of you, Miss Amy! The dog might have killed her. Warm-hearted people are always warm-tempered," he continued, as he tied up the hand, "And I am afraid that she is not very fond of children."

"She is very young and not accustomed to children," replied Amy, rightly judging that "she" indicated Lettice.

Having placed Angela in Perpetua's hands, the Immaculate, being in sore need of solitude and time for meditation, set off quickly for a sail.

But soon after he reached the shore, he heard a light patter of footsteps behind him, interrupted by a little gurgle of laughter, and turning, saw his small charge, clasping her doll and laughing roguishly. She was going for a row, too, she said, and, in spite of commands and remonstrances, the small despot of five summers had her will. The boat was soon gliding over the sea in the sunshine, Angela, the dog and the doll in the stern, the Immaculate, half amused and half angry, pulling long strokes, and facing this curious and contented trio.

The brightness and beauty, the refreshing breath of the salt breeze, the noble amphitheatre of hills retreating from the grand sweep of the bay, their bases covered with oleander, aloe, orange, lemon and myrtle trees, their higher slopes with olives, pines and oaks, their bare limestone tops, crowned with snow, piercing an azure sky, together with the pleasantness of shooting the boat with strong strokes over the dancing wave, revived the Immaculate's drooping spirits. A British troopship, homeward bound, stood in the offing, her white hulk azure with

reflected blue; English-built yachts sailed before the light wind; foreign coasting vessels, mostly with lateen sails, flitted along; sea-gulls hovered like living foam-flakes over the waves. The Immaculate shipped his sculls, hoisted a sail, lighted a pipe, and steered. Angela put a lead pencil into her own mouth and another into the dog's, and they smoked too.

When the boat touched the shore, at sunset, the chocolate-box was empty and Angela sadly indisposed. Lester, bearing a limp, dishevelled scrap of humanity back to the hotel in his arms, hoped that sea-sickness was not very bad for children. Perpetua would probably scold him roundly for letting her go in the boat; but how about von Wilden's beautiful theories of freedom and kindness? Boating must evidently be given up until Angela had evolved the quality of obedience. For in the course of the afternoon, the doll having fallen overboard, Angela sprang after it, and was cunningly caught by Nep and held above water, while the Immaculate, petrified with fear, had brought the boat round and hauled the trio in, as best as he could, while encumbered with the sculls.

"What *am* I to do with the brat?" he asked of Frau von Stein in the evening.

"Ach, Gott! Herr Lestare, you must loaf her and be patient."

All black misgivings and wretched doubts vanished, all the old glamour fell upon him again, when he sat that evening by the side of the exquisite creature pledged to him, gazing into her beautiful eyes and hearing her occasional musical monosyllables. There was a new something in her manner that took the edge from the morning's apprehensions and intensified her charm, an innocent pleading, a tender reproach. He handed her coffee and cakes, admired the beautiful curves ot her lips when they broke into soft smiles, the delicate tints of her cream and blush-rose face, the trembling of star-like jewels brought by him from Paris in her small polished ears.

Von Wilden touched the piano with unusual skill, gliding, as usual, into a Volkslied.

"Ach! wie ist's möglich dann,
Dass ich dich lassen kann,
Hab dich von Herzen lieb,
Dass glaube mir."

De Rolleau, touched by seeing the young couple, and hearing von Wilden's love-laden music, thought of Paris, and dashed a tear of sensibility, of which he was intensely proud, from his dark eye. Consenting to sing to von Wilden's accompaniment, he gracefully approached the piano, and, negligently tossing his hair from his brow, and placing one hand with easy elegance upon his hip, he began in a nasal high voice to sing to an air of monotonous melancholy, "Ic-i bas tous les hom-mes pleur-ent," with a pathos so profound that Nep, who had surreptitiously accompanied his master, lying outside the drawing-room door, and unable to suppress his emotion, burst into a prolonged and heart-rending howl, so dismal that it obliged several people to bury their faces in their hankerchiefs, Nep doubtless thinking that if all men wept, all dogs were privileged to do likewise. Not so De Rolleau, who, abruptly stopping his lamentations, uttered a Sacré with more r's in it than could be written down in five minutes, and left the room.

Miss Ada P. Williss then brought out her banjo, and sung a plantation song with a burden of "Yah,

yah, yah," succeeded by "Old folks at Home." The piano was then occupied by one of those terrible social evils who play with great execution. Her muscular exertion was enormous, her arms were laden with bangles that clanked like manacles, so that her listeners, especially the Germans, returned fervid thanks when, with a final bang on half the keys, she rose. Von Wilden's eyes glared fiendishly; he muttered injurious observations in six languages. The piece being attributed to Liszt, some English person murmured "Don't Liszt," the meaning of which, after ten minutes' deep meditation, penetrated to von Wilden's brain, and resulted in an explosion of laughter just as Frau von Stein was relating a pathetic anecdote of "mine blessed Mann."

Once more, in the quiet light of the eternal stars, a dreamer walked home in a dream. All the odorous air, blossoming earth, and hushed sea, were again replete with poetry, love and beauty.

All lingering doubts and fears had been effectually stilled by the touch of a talisman he carried, a parcel of seductive toys, a peace offering from

Lettice to Angela, now asleep in her cot, and watched by Perpetua, who knitted by a shaded lamp, and told her beads. Lester, his face full of reverent tenderness, looked long and silently at the rosy child, with her long, dark eye-lashes touching her velvety cheek, her dimpled arms flung carelessly abroad among her curls. Perpetua had hung a crucifix and a holy water vessel above the cot; she watched *l'eretico* with jealous eyes, making the sign that wards off the evil eye. His lips moved, his hand was slightly raised, as if in benediction; he kissed the baby brow very softly and stole away.

Perpetua rose, sprinkled some drops of holy water over the sleeper, and made the sign of the cross.

CHAPTER XI

"But there's a tree of many a one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something which is gone;
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat;
Whither is fled the visionary gleam,
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

THE romantic episode in the Riviera, flashing unexpectedly into the murkiness of chill January days, passed as quickly away, the glory and the loveliness swallowed in the dead prose of ordinary life. The Immaculate, who had then dreamed of no such bright possibilities, felt, on returning to England in the bitter wind of a black March day, that orange groves, palms and myrtles, their foliage stirred by the breath of young romance, their branches swept by the garments of beings of ethereal loveliness, were but dreams.

Lettice had already declined from an ideal to an

erring creature, with frailties in place of perfections. Compassion had succeeded to his early reverence for her; the selfishness, sharp temper, and flippancy so manifest in her, were but partly atoned for by youth and faulty education. Still he would mould his ideal wife from this plastic young material; Love would chisel something lovely from such unsullied youth. Yet he was sad, as he leant over the boat's side and saw the cold grey Dover cliffs. Hapless Immaculate!

Lettice would have been surprised, even amused, at the concern her small frailties caused him. A being so charming had a right to frailties, she thought. That this unreasonable man would think of her except with the blindest devotion, or that she had, or ever would have, duties towards him, never struck her. The Immaculate naturally fell in love with her at first sight; men always did; as he was agreeable and eligible, she accepted him. At nineteen it was high time to marry; rejecting suitors, she reflected, with a prudence for which her adorer did not give her credit, is all very well in early youth, while whole ranks of

men surrender at one glance; but on the verge of old maidhood no discreet girl should reject a good offer.

But she reckoned without her host in assuming that her will was to regulate Lester's actions, as she found before the brief Riviera days had passed.

Rocca Vecchia is a mediæval stronghold on a bare mountain crag, within a drive of Col Aprico. There the Villa Dolc' Acqua circle picnicked one day. Angela, having done her best to fall down an oubliette in the gloomy ruin, the Immaculate, catching her just as she was disappearing, had forbidden her to leave his hand again. Lettice and Amy wished to climb an eminence crowned with pines, whence an extensive view, including the hill-tops of Corsica, lying like purple gems in the sea, was visible. Having reached this desired spot, the two girls, with their knight and his two pets, sat beneath the soughing pines, where it was pleasant and airy on this sunny March afternoon. Gum oozed from the bark of the wind-rocked pines, filling the air with healthy fragrance; down through the dazzle of sunlight, over rounded, verdured hills, out upon a sea in which every

imaginable jewel seemed slowly dissolving in a flux of liquid gold, it was delightful to look; a barren, castled crag on the right, a wood of chestnut and oak flushed with russet buds, on the left, limestone mountains rising precipitously behind them, completed the picture. All this beauty and repose made them silent, even Angela and the dog.

"Now I know what these sails remind me of," Lettice exclaimed, starting from a reverie, "the Lebenschiffe at Carrie's wedding."

Some boats were tacking, so that the sails, broadside to the west, would be sheets of glory; then, at right angles to the first tack, they were shadowy grey.

The Immaculate remembered the occasion. "It was our first meeting," he said, "you were then a child with golden hair."

"That stupid man with his walnut-shell ships! And that boy whose candle went out! He died before the year was over," Lettice said.

"There must have been some devilry in it. How little I then guessed that I was standing by my fate," said the Immaculate tenderly.

"Ah! but our ships didn't sail together," Lettice objected; "yours ran after Amy's. Do you remember, Amy?"

Amy had disappeared with the child; they rose and followed her.

As they were descending the hill-side, their conversation fell on Angela. "It is cruel to spoil her so, Vivian," Lettice said, "she will have to go out in the world and earn her bread. How will she be fitted for roughing it?"

Lester's face changed. "Why should she rough it?" he asked.

"She has nothing," Lettice replied, a little frightened.

"She has me."

"And at your death?"

"She will not be forgotten."

"Adopted children are a mistake," she said.

"I am sorry you think so. I hoped that you would have been a mother to this child," he added. "The adoption was fully discussed at the time, dearest. Your father approved. I asked him to make it plain to you."

She replied that he had no right to burden her

with such a responsibility; he was silent, regretting that he had not better succeeded in making her understand what she was doing at the time of the engagement.

"In accepting each other, surely we accepted each other's responsibilities," he added, after a time. Lettice replied, with flushed cheeks and cold voice, that she could not and would not be bothered with other people's children.

At this stage they joined the rest of the party and returned to Col Aprico, the Immaculate in a high state of misery. It was hard upon Lettice, who seemed not to have understood the position, which he had so carefully explained to her parents along with other matter-of-fact details. He blamed himself for expecting so much of her. But what could he do at this eleventh hour?

It was his last evening, spent at Villa Dolc' Acqua, where supper was always a trial to his feelings. Fraülein Anna's knife was constantly disappearing between her charming lips; Frau von Stein too ostentatiously enjoyed her food and too frequently used both knife and fork to give point to her conversation; the German-

Swiss girl used hers as signalling instruments, —and von Wilden !—and de Rolleau ! But people's feelings must be respected. At all events, supper at Villa Dolc' Acqua was a penance hardly counterbalanced by the presence of Lettice. Yet had she not been present, the pain would have been less; for these sins against refinement were so many insults to that pure pearl of womanly excellence, a view of the question that would have intensely amused the fair lady herself.

To-night Lettice was pleased to manifest her displeasure by a haughty and chilling manner, receiving all his attempts at conversation with crushing monosyllables. Her monosyllables were a gift entirely her own; with them she could assent, dissent, kindle to enthusiasm, chill to despair, enchant with rapture, or crush with disdain; compared with the heavy ordnance of conversation, these monosyllables were as a needle-gun of delicate precision and long range. The needle-gun soon silenced the Immaculate's fire, reducing him to deepest gloom. But the table penance once over, he forgot everything save the necessity of loving Lettice and being a little

loved in return. Therefore, when they left the dining-room, he took a shawl from the vestibule, folded her in it and drew her silently, irresistibly, into the verandah, using sufficient gentle force to take away the young lady's breath—figuratively, not literally—and to impress her with a wholesome conviction that he was not to be trifled with. A silken thread was not for her; she must master or be mastered. Foolish youth! Drawing her hand through his arm, he made a beautiful tender little apology for his rough words at Rocca Vecchia, and immediately lost his temporary ascendancy over her, winning scorn and wrath instead.

She shed a few tears; he thought himself a brute. He succeeded, however, in drying the tears and in rivetting his bonds more firmly than ever. Then he spoke gently of his promise to the dead, sacred, impossible to break, a promise given when he was unfettered by other ties. He knew that he had asked and expected too much of her, perhaps he ought to not have asked it; but it was now impossible to go back. "Dearest," he added in his velvety voice, "help

me bear this burden. It is very sweet to me. It may be even sweeter to you one day. The child is dearer to me than anyone on earth—except yourself. She will wind herself round *your* heart one day."

"And that is why I hate the brat," the fair damsel reflected; but she only said that she would think it over.

It was enough for the Immaculate that Lettice was gracious again, and assented to tender nothings he said about their approaching parting and future meeting, and listened contentedly to other agreeable trifles. What could be more delightful? Young lovers strolling among moon-lit orange and myrtle trees in an Italian garden, within sound of the sea. The very birds nestled among the foliage might have envied the young human pair. Von Wilden, looking at the moon, an eclipse of which was due, caught sight of them and murmured some of Rückert's love-lyrics instead of measuring the eclipse, which was just beginning, thinking possibly that love-making was more amusing than astronomy. Frau von Stein, peeping through the half-drawn curtains,

was quite sure of it. What did the Frau care for the moon? She cared much for humanity, also for German propriety, which exacted a watchful gaze on the most intimate moments of a *Brautpaar* such as now moved in the soft odours and tender moonlight of that orange garden.

When the Immaculate bid his friends at Col Aprico good-bye, affectionately kissed by Frau Von Stein—but not a second time by von Wilden and de Rolleau—receiving a cordial hand-clasp from Amy Langton, with a frank, "See you again soon," and a polyglot valediction from the remaining ladies, he thought that friendship was a beautiful and pleasant thing, pleasanter and far more restful than love. Recreant knight! Heretical Immaculate! No longer can he be called perfect.

CHAPTER XII

"A little child, a limber elf,
Singing and dancing to itself,
A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
That always asks and never seeks,
Make such a vision to the sight
As fills a father's eyes with light."

ON a warm, still June afternoon, Lester and his little ward, just set down from a hansom, and followed, of course, by Nep, were walking slowly on the hot flags, now beginning to cool in the shade, by the trees clustering round the little Church of the Angels.

"I wish you had a half-holiday every day," Angela said in her best English. "I want to see ze beasts again, and give buns to ze bears."

"We can go on some Sunday. But would you not rather see your friend Miss Amy than the lions and tigers?"

"I sink I would yike bose at one time."

The relation between these two human beings

was daily becoming closer and more delightful. As Angela absolutely declined to stay away from Lester at Croft Hall, for the present they occupied some sunny bright rooms near one of the Parks, where the Immaculate spent much of his time. It was pleasanter than the solitude of chambers. He wrote and Angela played with her dolls in the same room, each having come to a mutual understanding of the wants of the other. The child took an interest beyond her years in all he did. When he went to the House of Commons, she understood that he was busy persuading people to build better houses for poor people, to prevent women and little children from working too hard, and to see to the defences of Great Britain.

Soon after her arrival in England, Angela had contrived to fall dangerously ill, of an illness which nearly proved fatal. All through one night, when she was thought to be sinking, Lester held the moaning half-conscious child, who turned and clung to him through it all, in his arms. Not till then did he imagine how much a child can be loved, though it is scarcely necessary to observe

that the Immaculate, perfect at all points, proved himself a first-rate father and a matchless sick nurse. As for Miss Angela, she could not have hit upon a better way of endearing herself to him than this little excursion deathwards; it was a stroke of genius. The closer she twined round his heart, the more surprising Lettice's aversion for her appeared to him.

At first he waited for an invitation, which never came, to take the child to see Lettice. Then he asked leave to bring her, when Lettice was anything but gracious. Once Mrs. Cecil Langton openly said it was a pity the child had not been removed by her illness; whereupon Lettice laughed her musical laugh, and observed that she had yet to run the gauntlet of half-a-dozen infantile maladies. At which observation, Lester's face changed; he said nothing but thought much. In proportion as Lettice was jealous of the child, she grew exacting to him; absolute homage was what she demanded. Blind Immaculate! no suspicion of her jealousy crossed his mind. But once, when severely scolded for not appearing at the Marshalls' in the height of

Angela's illness, he was provoked into saying that a child's life was more important than a woman's whim.

"Has it come to this?" cried Lettice, bursting into tears. "Men always change, but I did not think you would cease to love me so soon."

"And I did not think," retorted the Immaculate (whose virtues appear to be on the decline), for he was too indignant to be touched even by tears, "that a woman could be so selfish as to grudge anything to a dying child."

"You knew I was selfish, and yet you loved me," she replied with tearful reproach.

"It is because I love you so truly, that I want you to be unselfish," he returned gently.

"If you really loved me you would be content with me. If I were unselfish and prim and good, I should be somebody else. Why did you choose me if you wanted somebody else? You had better have left me alone."

"Do you really think so?" he asked, with a very grave face. "Is it your wish that we should part?"

Lettice was startled. She was not quite as

hard as she seemed. Annoyed at his absence for the sake of a sick child, she had not realised, though she had been told, that the little thing was in danger. In reproaching him for his pre-occupation, she expected passionate excuses for his negligence instead of grave rebuke for her selfishness. She wanted blind adoration; it was painful to find that a man could love her and still retain possession of his senses; still more painful to discover that he was ready to take her wild words in earnest. A pitiful look came over her sweet face: she turned to him with a gesture that went to his heart. "Vivian," she cried, "you are not going to leave me?"

This brought him penitent to her feet. He had been a brute, everything that was bad. She, startled from her self-absorption by fear of losing him, was sweeter to him than she had ever been; glamour once more fell upon him; how had he been found worthy of the love of so exquisite, so peerless a being? Yet she was a constant tribulation, perplexity, and cross in his life; and yet, before the poetical episode at Col Aprico, life

was more blessed than he knew, or than it would ever be again.

"Glück ohne Ruh,
Liebe, bist du,"

said Goethe, who ought to have known, considering his experience.

On that night Lester came to the conclusion that Lettice and Angela could not live under one roof; yet he was bound to both. To keep Angela would be to cherish a source of constant dissension; to send her away would be cruel, the child was too young to be given to strangers; besides, he had the usual masculine prejudice against boarding-schools. Revolving these thoughts as they walked, he looked down upon the upturned face of his little ward, and met her innocent smile of perfect childish confidence. He pressed the tiny hand in his own, thinking that if, instead of duty, it were choice, the exquisite grace and capricious beauty of Lettice would have small chance against Angela's innocent loving confidence. Perhaps poor Lettice's jealousy was justified after all.

"Not at home," said the maid who opened

the door of No. 9, with a smile for Angela.

"No one at home?" he asked.

"Miss Grace is at home, but she sees no one."

"But Amy, where is Amy?" asked the child, eagerly.

"Miss Amy is engaged, Miss."

"Say her Angela is come," said the child, bounding into the hall in perfect certainty of a welcome.

"Come back, Carina," the Immaculate said in Italian, "you are rude."

"The drawing-room is empty, please go in, sir," the maid said. "Miss Amy is in the study. When she hears who it is, she may like to see Miss Wingrove"; so he followed the child into the familiar friendly room, in which he had not been for ages.

It is not to be supposed that a being so beautiful, so pleasant, and so courteous as the Immaculate was anything but a social success. He went much into society before his engagement, and as much as circumstances would permit afterwards. But the Marshalls were not in any set he cared for. His people had, of

course, called on Lettice; Lady Evelyn Lester, an aunt, had done more, but with little success; she could not understand being patronised and snubbed by her nephew's *fiancée*, an underbred girl of nineteen.

"Poor Vivian," his family said, when the engagement was alluded to. "One would have credited him with better taste."

Protected by the "Not at home," Amy had chosen to work in the pleasant drawing-room by the open window. While writing there, the short, imperious rap of the postman had been heard; she had run out into the hall, taken a letter from the box, and read it more than once. When Angela and Lester came in, she was sitting upon a low seat, with the letter in her hand, and an expression of supreme emotion in her face. Raising her eyes at their entrance, she regarded them with a moved and preoccupied gaze. Sitting thus, in a thoughtful posture, every curve and line of her figure expressing the emotion visible in her face, afternoon sun lighting her bright hair, the simple folds of her dress falling gracefully round her,

she was an impressive and unforgettable picture. To the Immaculate it was a new revelation of Amy, filling him with some awe and much trust and admiration. "Our prophetess has grown into a beauty," he thought, while some seconds passed, during which she held both from addressing her by that look in which they had no part; then her face changed; Angela sprang to her neck; the Immaculate apologised for the intrusion. The child chatted gaily in her own Italian, pulling Amy's face down to her and making conversation impossible for some minutes. Graceful and agile, perfectly dressed in white, with all proper finishings and refinements, Angela was slighter and taller since her illness, having shot up, and grown pale and large-eyed.

"Do you think she is quite strong?" her guardian asked, taking the small wrist in his fingers and saying that it grew daily more slender. He was comforted by the assurance that she was only out-growing the chubbiness of infancy, and showed every appearance of improving health. Presently he burst out in

French with, "Somebody dislikes children, especially this one."

"Somebody is only a child herself. A time will come when she will turn to them."

"So that one need only wait?"

"Quite so. Besides, where there is real and true affection, dislikes and different tastes are trifles."

"Real and true affection." He looked at the unconscious child in silence for a few moments, and Amy was seized with a fear lest further revelations should come. "I must say one thing," she added quickly; "Somebody is the only creature who should be aware of these things."

"I acknowledge the rebuke." Yet he had not told her, and had scarcely dared tell himself, the real trouble. But he was hurt; he felt, with the unreason of his sex, that Amy had lost interest in him and repulsed his confidence.

"Do you remember á Kempis?" she said, gently, "Nothing is hard to Love."

He remembered á Kempis, also Coleridge,

> "And then he knew it was a fiend,
> That miserable knight."

"After all," he added, "There is something better than Love, Duty."

"Something of importance has happened to you to-day," the Immaculate said presently.

"Yes," she replied, colouring, "of great importance."

He rose, and went to a table to look at some flowers. "She is going to be married," he thought. "May I congratulate you?" he asked, returning, after a short silence, with the utmost propriety and equal to all conventionalities, as usual.

"It certainly is a subject for congratulation, Mr. Lester. The struggles, uncertainties and disappointments of my profession are at an end."

"Ah!" he thought, most mournfully," she has come to her senses at last; the true woman is awake—too late."

"I am so glad for my mother's sake. You know our narrow circumstances; I shall be able to help her substantially now. I have told no one yet. The engagement is but just completed."

"Thank you," the Immaculate returned with a dejected air, "I am *so* glad to be the first to

hear it." Yet he looked singularly wretched.

"Only a woman," she continued, "a woman who has gone through such struggles as I have, can quite sympathise with me. Men take these things as matters of course; to women it is a great thing, a new life."

"Surely it is new life to men, perhaps even more so than to women," he objected with great humility. "Well, I congratulate you with all my heart. I cordially hope that you will be happy."

"I shall be, I must be, happy. Filled with such duties and responsibilities, life cannot fail to be happy. I am very happy already."

The Immaculate's beautiful face was grey and anxious; he wondered why he felt so wretched. Was it because he knew that no one was good enough for her? "Is it—pardon my curiosity, dear prophetess—" he asked, "has it been long on the—ah—under consideration?"

"About three months—not longer."

"Ah!" Many obscure things now became clear to the Immaculate, one of them, that he had made a serious mistake three months ago, when

he might have won a prize—but this he quickly banished. "I thought," he remarked weakly, "I thought there was a something. You will not," he added in a choking voice, "you will not forget old friends, I hope?" Poor faultless knight! His beautiful dark eyes were very wistful as he looked up.

"Mr. Lester! Do you know me so little as to ask? I never forget friends, old or new, do I Angela?" taking the little girl, who had been looking at pictures till she was tired, on her knee.

"*Façon de parler*, Miss Amy. One asks because one wants to be re-assured. When does—h'm!—it take place?"

"Almost immediately. In a week or two, I suppose," she replied carelessly. "But tell me of yourself. What you are writing—thinking—doing? We hear whispers of a Private Bill."

"You are too good; my affairs will wait," he returned, with deeper and deeper melancholy. "Who—who is he? Do I know him?"

"Of whom do you speak? Do you mean the Secretary? Because she's a woman. They are all women."

The Immaculate's brain turned like a humming-top. "Who are all women?" he gasped faintly; "there must be a man somewhere, even in a marriage."

"But what marriage are you thinking of, Mr. Lester?" Amy cried in desperation. "Are you alluding to your own?"

"I was speaking of yours."

"But why should you begin to think of such an improbability all at once, *à propos* of nothing? I spoke of a Private Bill."

"I was thinking of your future husband."

"As if people could marry Private Bills! If you think I am going to be married, Mr. Lester, you are mistaken. I was referring to my engagement as assistant surgeon to the New Hospital for Women in Great Windsor-street."

"Well! I *am*—" cried the Immaculate, with a shout of laughter.

CHAPTER XIII

"Oh, and is all forgot now,
Our childhood's innocence,
Our school-day loves, the friendship,
No change could recompense?"

IT was now five years since Amy Langton had been banished from her mother's house by the fraternal decree, five industrious, eventful years, during which she had scarcely even been in the neighbourhood. It was impossible to re-visit the scene of old troubles and joys without some elation. In the meantime she had reached the ambitious summit, which in old days had seemed but a far-off dream, she had assaulted and carried the out-works of the medical profession. To her family she was still "that Amy," that inconvenient and uncomfortable member of the family, whose proceedings were a constant annoyance to right-minded people.

On her return to England in April, when she

had been admitted to the old home in Angel Road, she had set to work in good earnest to obtain professional employment. A plate inscribed

"Amy Langton, M.D., Consulting Physician.
Hours 9 till 5,"

had been set up in a house in town, in which she had a small consulting room on a third floor. Here she found ample leisure for study, especially of chimneys, but few patients and fewer fees. But she lived on hope and went to and from Angel Road with a cheerful spirit and undaunted courage, until the want of rent for the room and the near prospect of the hospital appointment led her, in the beginning of June, to remove her plate and her presence.

Grace had permanently left Angel Road, which she had not revisited since leaving it to become a novice, until her return from the Riviera, when she spent a few days there. Before taking final vows she had been visited by her mother, her sisters, and Cecil: Cecil had not opposed her desire after the first; he thought that, if Grace did not intend to marry, her best plan was to immure

herself respectably for life. He therefore bid his sister farewell with gentlemanly composure, reflecting, as he handed his weeping mother into a cab, "At least one of them is off our hands."

Not that his sister's care and maintenance in any way depended upon him, each having her own tiny private fortune; being "on his hands" consisted apparently in sharing his mother's roof with him, —for this occurred before his marriage—and being ready to perform those thousand and one little services sisters are so ready in giving and brothers often so careless in receiving.

Julius had been less tolerant. He disliked conventual life, looking at sisterhoods, from a medical point of view, as hotbeds of hysteria and mental and bodily weakness. He therefore did his best to dissuade his sister from the religious life; but the more he argued the more firmly was Grace set upon it, her principal aim being to mortify her "vile body." Still Julius considered Grace's errors respectable; he had never been in open rupture with her as with Amy. Julius was known to be the writer of that clever pamphlet on London water, illustrated

by cuts of creatures revealed by the microscope in those crystal deeps. He had just begun that series of papers on the perils of adulterated food and the diseases hidden in milk, which resulted in the starvation of many worthy people, who, finding danger lurking in every drop of water, milk, and in all foods, lived entirely upon eggs, oysters, and salads, with Rhine wine imported straight from the growers. His article upon the methods of cooking wines for export, with that on sewage contamination of oysters and water-cress, deprived those unfortunates of their last support, and resulted in the untimely death of many.

"And yet," Mrs. Langton would plaintively say in moments of confidence to her stepson, "though all pretty, your sisters never marry, and the youngest is twenty. Of course, Steven, no one expects Grace to marry; nuns never do. At Coldwell they see nobody but their assistant priest, who could not possibly marry them all; and their priest, Grace tells me, is married. Nor could one expect anything from Amy; although, at one time, I had hoped—but he is engaged to

Lettice Marshall. But I did think that the others would do something."

"Do something?" echoed Stephen; "I thought you disliked——"

"In the marriage way, Stephen. They are both handsome girls and not at all clever, and they are not even too religious; indeed I often have to insist upon Georgie's going to church on Sunday. One of them plays, the other sings; they know nothing and have no opinions whatever. I do all I can for them. They make their own dresses at home; we save in every way to go into society. 'Do marry those girls, mother,' Cecil says, or Julius begins, 'Mother, when *are* those girls going to marry?'—Imagine! four unmarried daughters! I try to bear it, Stephen; no doubt it is a just punishment for my sins. They say it is catching if one goes off."

"Well," he returned, "we have had one marriage. Let us hope it may be catching."

"Cecil's marriage is out of the family," said the much-enduring mother. "For a son is not married from one's house, nor does his wife provide for him. Everything is falling, and what

we should do without your generous help, Steven, I cannot think."

"I wish it were more," the head of the family replied, "but of course I must think of my children. Steenie will be going to Cambridge; Jack's Eton bills are not small—Well! you know all the expensive items. And I hope your dividends will go up again before long."

It was after this conversation that Mrs. Langton returned to Angel Road to receive the announcement of Amy's appointment in the following terms:—"It is the crown of success. Labour and competence without struggle. All my patients will be women; I don't like attending men. Mrs. St. Luke would never have accepted me, for all the governors and trustees in the world, if she had not been convinced of my capacity. Mother, dear, *do* be glad. You need not leave this house. I can guarantee the rent for you now," she added.

Yet Mrs. Langton wept on hearing of the appointment, because, she said, it seemed to make the thing more real. Her child was now fairly committed to this career; there was no longer

any chance of her withdrawing in disgust. "She will be shut up in a horrid place full of sick people and smelling of oiled silk and drugs, and never see any society," she observed to Georgie in confidence. "Just as she is beginning to be really pretty and to take an interest in her dress!"

"It is a pity, mother, but it might be worse, and she will be at least provided for," replied Georgie. "No one could possibly dream of marrying so clever and strange a girl as Amy. What can she talk of? What can she do? She has no time to learn tennis"—then new; golf was scarcely known out of Scotland, ladies' cricket and bicycling still in the womb of time—"She reads no novels but old ones"—Ibsen was then unknown, Zola young—"She dislikes gossip; she won't listen to risky stories and jokes. She is always so particular and prim with men. She *can't* flirt. She knows nothing of the peerage or society scandals, or the private life of literary people and actresses. And of china and *chiffons* she knows nothing and cares less. What is the use of alluding to jokes out of the last burlesque to her? She objects to talk of *causes célèbres*,

especially divorce cases. As for music, she didn't even know that Usignuola had run through two husbands' fortunes and been divorced. Now, mother, what *could* a man say to Amy? Nature intended her for an old maid. Let us be thankful that she is so comfortably shelved."

"You talk very fast, my dear," Mrs. Langton observed, "and I am never quite sure whether you are in earnest or jest." She admitted that her child's pecuniary help was timely, though it was painful to take it from a daughter.

"But you don't consider the pleasure and pride of helping, mother," Amy replied.

The first thought of Amy's heart was to fly to Louisa Stanley, and discuss—for of course she knew—the delightful news. She watched Louisa as we watch some rare and exquisite blossom, knowing that it must soon fall, trying to prolong its frail existence to the utmost. Louisa had inspired the enthusiasm of her life and fallen a martyr to it; she had fed her with bright hopes and noble dreams; she had given her a home and affection when her own cast her out. If Jonathan's love was passing the love of women,

many women's friendship far overpasses the love of men.

Louisa's rooms were usually full of girl students; to-day she was found alone, busy drawing diagrams for her student friends.

"So glad you came. I've been longing to talk it over," was Louisa's first word.

"Pray talk," said Amy, wondering why Louisa's delicate face became crimson. But Louisa went on drawing in silence, with a changing colour. "I wonder how you will like it?" she asked after a time.

"How can you wonder! The conclusion is foregone."

"I hope you will like *him*, Amy," with another wave of colour and a furtive glance.

"But who am I to like?"

"Well!—the—happy events."

"Happy, indeed. The star of the Langtons certainly is in the ascendant now. My sister Georgie and Charlie Lovelace are finally engaged and the wedding day fixed, after five years of flirtation—philandering. Algernon writes to tell us that he has found a gold mine, after all his failures and

losses. Julius has an appointment that has never been given to a man of his years before——"

"And Amy has an appointment that has never been given to a woman of her's before. All is *couleur de rose.* I am glad Georgie's marriage is settled. I had heard that Mr. Lovelace was engaged to Lettice, and poor Mr. Lester left to wear the willow. I am sorry for our Bayard, Amy. He will never be happy with Lettice."

"Oh! marriage is such a lottery, Louie. What a mercy that you and I have never been tempted to draw a number!"

"The numbers are not *all* blanks."

"Nearly all. Every day I am more convinced that advanced women must not marry. How many a fine capacity has been smothered in domestic frivolities! With advancing years I approach your views of celibacy."

"My views!"

"Have you forgotten your order of secular celibates devoted to science?"

"I remember talking a good deal of nonsense at odd times, Amy," replied Louisa, with a quaint little smile.

"But this was one of the few sensible things that you ever said. Just as a woman's mind is developing and she is making progress, some horrid man comes and she throws everything to the winds for him. In four years she can talk of nothing but babies, servants, and clothes."

"No, no. Look at Mrs. St. Luke."

"An exception. Let us found a society for the suppression of matrimony among the——!"

"The Blues?"

"Yes, the Blues."

"Impossible."

"Why?" asked Amy, half laughing, half serious, and expecting some merry quip from her friend.

"Because Edward Graham and I are going to be married next month," replied Louisa, dropping her pencil and looking up. "There; the murder is out," she added, laughing.

"*You* going to be married!" cried Amy. "How *dare* you?"

"What woman dare I dare," she replied, "I am my own mistress."

"And therefore you are going to take a master. I could not have thought this of you."

Tears came into Amy's eyes when she remembered how short Louisa's time was, and that another hand than her's would smooth the rough path to the grave for her—or leave it rougher.

"Well!" she sighed at last, "I suppose it must be borne. This flood-tide of marrying must at last subside. As I am already engaged for two weddings next month, perhaps you will fix a blank day for yours."

"You may see another before long," said Louisa, laughing.

"What! are there any more fools left?"

"Only Lettice and our Bayard."

Amy rose and went to the window, where she plucked a few geranium leaves and looked out.

"Lettice is so young," she said. But she was thinking of her two grand friendships, both broken.

CHAPTER XIV

"To the lists his steed might bear him,
He might cry to the knights amain,
'Let him for the fight prepare him,
Who charges my love with a stain!'

"Oh! then they would all be silent,
But a cry from his soul would dart,
Alas! he must plunge his lance-point
In his own accusing heart."—*Heine.*

IT was mid-July; London was hot and dusty, trees in the parks were dusty and dark, the very sunshine seemed jaded. The prose of existence weighed heavily upon the Immaculate; his life was like a London July; Lettice took no interest in anything that he cared for; he could not be interested in anything that pleased her. Literature, art, public life, the relation of men to each other and to the Unseen; none of these things ever concerned Lettice. Save her beauty and grace, there was not a breath of poetry about her, all was flattest prose. Her lover

longed, amid the prosaic turmoil of town and toil, for the green pastures and still waters of poetry, the poetry of life.

While he walked and mused, a face flashed out from the crowd of carriages, a face full of beauty and intellect, young, smiling, a poem in itself. It was Amy Langton's; yet she, too, was tired and hot, and thinking of green pastures. The air instantly lost its heaviness, sunbeams their lurid tinge, the jaded crowd jostling on the hot pavement, the wheels and hoofs clattering on the road, were purged of prose for the Immaculate. To him it was like the song of a wood-bird on the outskirts of a dreary town.

Later in the day he was dropped from a hansom at the Marshalls' house at Notting Hill, where he found the drawing-room empty, though the dinner hour was striking. An envelope lay on the writing table, folded in the newest style and addressed in Lettice's large girlish writing to Mrs. Fitzwilliam; it had been placed there on purpose to attract his attention, by the wilful beauty, who resented his earnest and repeated desire that she should give up this fascinating but rowdy woman, of whom he

had only that day heard contemptuous mention at a club. Some music stood on the open piano, a duet for baritone and soprano voices. It was marked C. Lovelace, and some mischievous hand had scribbled beneath "and Letty" in pencil. Yet Lettice did not care to sing duets with her betrothed. Among the few books in the room were some he had given her with an affectionate request to read them for his sake. The leaves were uncut, except where he had marked passages for her attention. The fly-leaf of one bore a caricature of himself in wig and gown. Lettice's needlework lay just as she had thrown it aside. He liked her to work; it was a domestic, feminine occupation. How wonderful and graceful was the way in which the delicate fingers wielded the tiny tool! He took the work in his own hands and tried clumsily to hold the little shining needle in his fingers, which seemed so awkward and immense in contrast with her's.

Then Lettice appeared, in white muslin and fresh moss-roses, all smiles and graciousness. She had refrained from entering the drawing-room before for three reasons: first, because she

wished to avoid a lecture, as she styled her lover's innocent endeavours to improve her mind; secondly, because she wanted him to have full leisure to observe her note to Mrs. Fitzwilliam and the music that testified to a recent duet with Mr. Lovelace; and, thirdly, because she believed waiting to be a wholesome discipline for lovers and good training for the severer restraints of married life. Her favourite theory, that coolness on one side kindles love on the other, had proved its truth in an unexpected manner. Lester, outwardly as devoted now as ever, had lost that enthusiasm which she confessed had bored her, with the result that he had acquired a new worth in her eyes.

To-night she was dressed to please his taste; she even had a rose-bud for him, which he accepted with due gratitude but no emotion. He looked reflectively upon the exquisite face, so near the flower she was fastening in his coat and so like it, and received her bewitching up-turned glance with no more emotion than if she had been a tailor measuring him. He was wondering how many such smiles and roses had been bestowed

upon Mr. Lovelace. So grave and intent was the look in his dark eyes that poor little rose-leaf Letty was frightened.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "If you look so grave, I shall think that you are cross because I kept you waiting."

"Not cross, dearest," he replied, taking the hand that was still busy with the coat, "I was thinking——"

But Letty's father coming in just then, the Immaculate's thoughts remained untold. Major Marshall received him with cordiality, proud of the sight of his daughter's frail and delicate beauty, set off by the tall, knightly looking man with dark eyes and irreproachable bearing. That he had been in the army and still retained his brevet rank, was all known to the world of this gentleman; but everybody acknowledged that, whatever her faults, Mrs. Marshall was a long-suffering woman. The Major now had business in the City, about which only one thing was certain, namely, that its profits were not. The Marshall brothers were fast young men, one in the army, one an emigrant, the youngest in a Government office,

and living under the paternal roof. This young man followed his father, and was soon followed by his sister, Mrs. Cecil Langton, who was on a long visit with her children.

After the uncomfortable dinner, "ong fameal," as Major Marshall said, Lester found Lettice in a low chair, reading in the fading light. When he appeared, the book vanished among the folds of her dress.

"Spoiling your eyes, Lettice?" he asked, drawing a chair to her side, "A pity to spoil anything so bright. You might find them useful some day."

"They were only intended for ornament," she replied, with the gay insolence that became her so well, "I never mean them to be useful."

"Not even for wool-work? And novels?"

"Making out that I read nothing but novels!" she pouted.

"Do you ever read anything more solid, dearest?"

"Now you are going to lecture me in words a foot long. Do you take me for the House of Commons?"

"You don't look like it," he replied with admiration; "more like a House of Uncommons?"

"I like you when you talk nonsense," she returned.

"Thank you, dearest; then I'll never talk sense. But promise me that you will look into the books I sent you. You gave me an inch, so I take an ell."

"I have read every word of them, you teasing man! But I am not going to stand an examination upon them," she pouted.

"Oh!" he said. He looked grave and hurt.

Then lights were brought in and he had to leave his chair, which was in the way. It was some minutes before he resumed his seat and conversation. "I found something about Balzac the other day and cut it out for you," he began. "It will explain why I wanted you not to read that novel. If you really wish to study his works, you will find 'Eugènie Grandet' pleasanter and more suitable."

"Oh! I don't want any more French; I am reading such a pretty thing of Loulou's; the heroine is like a serpent."

"Do you *like* Loulou's works, Lettice?"

"Better than French. Vif, you have frightened me from French," she replied with a frank smile.

How lovely she was in her soft cloudy muslin, her pretty white hands clasped in her lap, her graceful head resting against the high-backed chair, with the lamplight falling on the golden hair and fresh rosebuds. But why should the Immaculate sigh and say to himself, "Poor child"?

Then Arthur Marshall lounged in, wrapped in cigar-smoke. "Are you people going to sit looking at each other all the evening?" he asked, subsiding in an easy chair and yawning. His mother roused herself from a gentle doze and asked him if he would like a rubber with his father.

"The governor is in his den," he replied. "I say, Letty, you might amuse a fellow."

Then Lester, who had had enough of being amused, perhaps, suggested music, and Lettice rose and went to the piano, her dress sweeping something from her chair to his feet that he picked up and tossed savagely away. It was Balzac's "Scènes de la Vie Parisienne."

During the music the Major came in; brandy in

his eye, brandy in his talk, brandy in his gait. His wife looked keenly at him; at last Lester understood the family phrase, 'the governor is in his den.' He looked from the father to the fragile creature at the piano with an extreme pang of pity.

While he was getting his hat and coat in the hall, a white figure flashed down the stair and beckoned him into the dining-room. It was Lettice, drooping, penitent, lovely. She looked down for a few moments and then faltered, "I didn't read much."

He did not reply; her humiliation pained him too much.

"You are angry," she said, leaning her face against him to hide her tears. He put his arm round the pretty, frail thing, but said nothing.

"You are so high-flown, Vif. Men never believe women. Mamma always fibs to papa, and Carrie to Cecil, and nobody minds. I wish you would not take things so seriously."

"I can't help it," he gasped; then they stood in silence a moment, she with her flushed wet face and tumbled golden hair pressed against him,

he a little stiff, almost as if he shrank from her. At last she lifted her face with something of her old winning confidence; "You still love me?" she asked, tenderly.

He wished her good-night, and went. Lettice threw herself on a sofa and sobbed in her childish way. "The angrier he is, the more I care for him," she thought.

"And this," he reflected, as he drove away, "is the creature I worshipped."

Passion rarely turns to indifference, the rebound is generally hate. Presently he dismissed his cab and strolled down to the Embankment, whither he often repaired, sometimes to study the wrecked humanity there, sometimes to meditate.

A flowing river impresses the imagination, disposing the mind to contemplation of the abstract; it makes the tangled web of individual joys and cares vanish and give place to that varied, many-hued tissue, the great vesture of human life, woven at the loom of time by fate, fortune and natural law, and guided by an unknown purpose to an unknown end. But the Thames—the Thames, which has seen the

tragedy and comedy of so many centuries!—so much human emotion has mingled with its waters through all the ages, the wonder is that it does not arise, itself a soul, and tell its secrets and mysteries. Glory of stars above, dark mystery of waters below, light airs in young trees, chimes floating from the clock-tower visible above the majestic pile along the waterside; all soothed, all tended to that intense species of rêverie in which thought is too keen and rapid for words.

Presently, while pacing beneath the trees, after a cigar and much thought, Lester became interested in a man sitting on a bench in an attitude of extreme dejection, and sat by him, arousing no responsive interest. It was a sodden, nerveless, hopeless face, that changed not at all when speaking in reply to the Immaculate's civil remarks. No; he was not going home; he had no home, no friends, nothing. He was a French polisher once.

"When did you eat last?" Lester asked, pained by the utter gloom of the dull voice and duller eyes.

"Don't know. But I know I was jolly drunk last night. No baccy, thankie. I haven't so much as a pipe."

"Here is one," said the Immaculate, after a short, severe struggle with his feelings, because it was a black and beautiful briar-wood pipe, the result of time and judicious smoking. "Cheer up! Tell me what you are going to do. Here's a light," striking a match.

The man lighted the pipe and smoked; his face changed. "You ain't a Holy Joe," he said, turning to look at him, "I'm blowed if you're not a bloomin' young toff."

"A man," he replied, gently, "like all men, knowing something of misery. Tell me all about yours."

"I worked for a large firm, good wages, nice little 'ome—nice young wife—she *died!* One little gell left, three year old. Grew up pretty, and a style with her, I tell yeh, a style. She—she went—*wrong*."

"Ah—ah!" Lester's hand went out with his heart and his voice, and gripped the workman's firmly and warmly. "And then you lost heart,"

he said, "cared for nothing, took to drink. No wonder!—no wonder! *I* have a little girl, too; she is five."

"You'll come home with me and have supper," he said later, after hearing a long, long story. "Then you shall have a ticket for a lodging. To-morrow we'll see about work."

Of what subsequently passed between the sodden, starved tramp and the bloomin' young toff there is no record. But it is known that some months later a French polisher showed his mate a blackened briar-wood pipe he did not use.

"He'd a polished it hisself," he said, looking tenderly at it, "but 'twas the 'and-grip as fetched me."

CHAPTER XV.

" How sweet are looks that ladies bend
On whom their favours fall,
For them I battle to the end,
To save from shame and thrall—"

WESTMINSTER is a place to think in, to dream in—if one happens not to know it too well. Thorney Isle, lonely and desolate, but visited at dead of night by an Apostle known only to the ferryman, when the first Saxon Church there was hallowed twelve hunded years ago, Thorney Isle has seen the pageant of England's growth in those centuries; through it has throbbed, as through the main artery to a heart, through the Abbey, the Hall, and St. Stephen's, the strong deep pulse of a nation's life.

For a young woman still capable of enthusiasm, like Amy Langton, it was a great moment when she climbed for the first time to the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons,

and looked down upon the assembled legislators. What if the walls which rang with the eloquence of Pitt and Fox, and witnessed the long strife of the Civil War, are there no more? Historic unity is unbroken; the mantle of old association has fallen upon the newer building.

After all, is not the floor of the House like some gay listed ground of old, the members like mail-sheathed knights with silken scarves and drooping plumes, waiting, with beating pulses and lance in rest, the herald's signal to charge? Does not the Speaker's silence say, like the herald's trumpet and voice, "Brave knights, there is glory to win. Gallant knights, do your *devoir*. Strike for your ladies and do valiantly. Life is only once to lose, but glory never dies!" For gay balconies lined with ladies there was the gallery cage; for the applause of multitudes the pressmen's reports. But every knight might have his own lady in his heart. All save one, who

> "Perforce must plunge his lance-point
> In his own accusing heart."

So greatly was she impressed by this, it was

distressing to Miss Amy Langton to hear Mrs. St. Luke's careless observations on the expressive stammer of one honourable member, the part played by another's eye-glass in the legislation of his country, the strange adventures of another's hat, the expression latent in yet another's handkerchief. Strange and wonderful it was to reflect how great a part these harmless looking people in chimney-pot hats and ugly garments were playing.

"Who is that dark young man on the Government side?" asked Mrs. St. Luke, the well-known first woman physician.

"That," she replied, with a flush of pride, "is the man you were speaking of, the member for Dalesby."

"To be sure, the writer of 'Some Cankers in Civilisation.' Engaged to Mrs. Fitz-william's protégée, fast little Lettice Marshall, poor man! We shall hear some exalted sentiments from that young gentleman, Amy, if he says anything. And when the breach of promise is before us, we shall hear, but not from him, all the old cheap pleasantries on our poor sex, and all the old namby pamby sentiment. And I prophesy that

twenty years from this year of grace, 1879, the same stale jokes and the same cheap twaddle on the same subject—one which the average male cannot take seriously—will be uttered in this same place.* This Mr. Lester looks as if he had just stepped out of a mediæval romance. Female Suffrage would be to his advantage."

"He is against the Cause, and his political economy is unsound," returned Amy, with deep gravity.

The business transacted below was not of absorbing interest; it had something to do with herrings. Then an honourable member got on his legs to ask why a British general with a tiny force had been defeated in Africa; he heard that Government intended to know the reason why. Another asked if Government knew that a perverse subject had had the audacity to starve? Government promised to look into it. Honourable members put interminable questions upon every conceivable subject; an excited Irishman got out of order; an honourable member appealed to the Speaker so informally that he was himself called to order.

* Fulfilled in February, 1897.

All in vain did the Speaker, contrary to his usual silence, maintain that the honourable member who had appealed to him was in order, and signify that he should continue his observations; cries of "order," interruptions from honourable members calling him to order for every word, and each called to order by others, produced the effect of a general mellay, amid which, ever and anon, rose the voice of the Speaker, like the herald's trumpet and crying of the rules of the tourney. Some honouable members coughed, some laughed, some talked. There were cheers, counter cheers, ironical cheers. In '79 the Closure had not been adopted. Mrs. St. Luke was delighted. "We have come in for the rarest fun," she whispered.

"But what is it all about? They all seem bent on a row. Who is offended?" Amy asked.

Gradually the storm subsided, the Speaker confirmed the remarks of an honourable member, to the effect that the excited Irishman had put himself out of order by addressing the leader of the House instead of the chair, and that by some fatality every member who attempted to call any

other to order had himself fallen out of order; somebody apologised to somebody; everybody appeared satisfied, peace was restored, when it occurred to a distinguished honourable member on the Opposition benches that the excited Irishman's remarks had been received with derison, and that excited Irishmen's remarks usually were received with derison on the Government side. So there was a second row.

"The debate will be tame after this," ladies whispered in their cage.

At last the repeal of the Breach of Promise of Marriage Act was moved. On one side, the undesirability of seeking balm for broken hearts in the shape of hard cash, on the other, the necessity of chastising heartless betrayers amusing themselves at the expense of women's happiness, prospects, and even reputation, was set forth. Then a plain, common-sense speaker described the Act as "a law to oblige a man who has made a mistake to render two people miserable for life." Many other sensible and calm things this man said—that such actions were resorted to only by the mercenary and the unworthy; that those

whose hearts were really hurt would not expose their wounds to the public gaze; that no modest woman would let her name be dragged through Courts of Justice; that the law was a snare into which unsuspecting men were driven by wily schemers.

It was said in return that this last was an abuse such as all things are liable to; that the action was usually forced upon women by relatives; that the law did not seek to give balm for wounded affections, but compensation for ruined careers; that a jilted woman rarely has a second chance of marriage, which, in many cases, means livelihood; and that working women throw up their employments on the prospect of marriage, and, even if not unable to resume them after breach of promise they at least lose time and credit. He also commented on the inconstancy of his sex and the necessity of punishing triflers with female affections. Both gentlemen spoke without passion or levity, and in a tone of which even the Immaculate approved; so that the debate promised to be very dull.

Then a melancholy person with a forlorn

bachelor air, spoke of the perils of the unprotected male in a world consisting chiefly of powerful and scheming females, most of whom made it their business to marry; remarks which commanded the sympathetic attention of the House. Justice, he said, was not to be obtained in a court consisting entirely of male creatures, when the complainant or the defendant was of the softer sex; the difficulty was increased tenfold when the female complainant or defendant was possessed of personal charms, "and what woman" he pathetically asked, "is not?" (Hear, hear! Cheers and laughter.) "What chance of justice" he demanded "would a man have against a not absolutely hideous person in petticoats and tears?" Therefore, he required the abolition of the process on account of its injustice.

This was promptly met by a spirited champion, armed with statistics of damages granted to men; he made fun of the honourable member of bachelor aspect, and said nothing in particular in an amusing way.

The next speaker said that public opinion kept gentlemen from breaking engagements, while the

lower classes worked too hard to have time to indulge in fine feelings. He thought it an interference with the liberty of the subject to investigate these private matters. He spoke of the cruelty of reading love-letters in Court. "What honourable member" he asked with emotion, "would care to have his own amatory effusions confided to the public ear?" (Hear, hear!) Someone replied that it might improve their style. (No, no! Hear, hear! Laughter.)

Then rose a shrewd and worldly member, who had never been in earnest about anything, not even about dinners or bets, and who had a command of measured speech and a fund of humour. Honourable members chuckled or laughed outright while he darted shafts of bright-pointed sarcasm at every weakness of the frailer sex, for whom he appeared to have an amused, half-tolerant contempt. There was not a smile in the Ladies' Gallery; the honourable member for Dalesby scowled savagely at him. He pictured man a great-hearted, generous Samson, perpetually victimised by the wiles of astute and scheming Delilahs. He maintained that the

process for breach of promise gave more power to the already too-powerful woman. He quoted Samson Agonistes with a humorous application. He called upon the laws of his country to defend weak Man against strong Woman. Then he descanted on the love of change natural to man, which led him to make many essays in courtship before finally deciding on a wife. He appealed to honourable members to consider the ease with which man was ensnared by bright eyes and pink and white faces. "Shall a man," he asked, "pay so great a penalty for the folly of a moment?"

"Yes," replied the member for Dalesby, catching the Speaker's eye, "He shall suffer for the term of his natural life."

For men, he maintained, were fickle by nature they were heartless and selfish in their dealings with women. He said hard things of Milton, maintained that his poetry, happiness and moral dignity were all marred by his want of chivalry. He censured the cowardice of those men who trifle with the affections of women—beings more emotional, more dependent upon

affection for happiness than men; beings condemned by nature to weakness and suffering, and less able than men to resist the pain of betrayal; beings whose reputation was so susceptible of stain, and so often tarnished even by a broken contract; beings whose affections were purer, more constant and more unselfish than those of men. Men made such promises too lightly. In the higher classes he thought honour and deference to public opinion were a check; in the lowest he would recommend kicking; but in the middle classes, the action for breach of promise was the best check. He warmed to his work, words came readily, previous speakers, especially, the last flippant man, were severely handled. Presently the word honour set him on fire; he quoted from Burke's lament over the ashes of dying chivalry, the "chastity of honour that felt a stain like a wound," finishing with a glowing peroration on that burning theme.

It was spirited; it was a surprise and a success; it carried hearers with it, proving that he could interest people and make them listen, that he could be savagely sarcastic. The velvety voice

could ring; it could rise and fall, penetrate and persuade.

To a young woman in the gallery, it proved that there was only one man in the whole world, and that she loved him with all her heart.

"For he is worth it," she thought, gladly and proudly.

CHAPTER XVI

"But for loving, why, you would not, sweet,
Though we prayed you,
Paid you, brayed you
In a mortar—for you could not, sweet."

"NOW, Vif, let us talk it over. You may smoke—do what you like, only do not, my dear, dear boy, do not throw your life away on—a mad punctilio!"

"Dear Aunt Evelyn, you are most kind; but I'm old enough and bold enough to take care of myself."

Lady Evelyn Lester had been a beauty; she resembled the Immaculate, her godson; she was handsome still.

"It is useless to tell you," she continued, "that a career is before you. That Loughborough will one day be in office, that not only he, but all of them, have their eyes upon you. But I will say this, would any girl with a grain of self-respect

like to know that she was married, not for love, but loyalty?"

"No lady that I am acquainted with will ever know any such thing."

"Vivian, this marriage will be wretched; *she* will be wretched; your ways will be misery to her. If she cared for you it would be different. But she does not. Would she have refused to go with you and our party the other night on the plea of a headache, and then have appeared with the Fitzwilliam clan, flirting with that wretched young Lovelace? Of breeding I will say nothing. But does such conduct argue love? In public, before your eyes! Such a marked insult."

"This is painful," he replied, "No more, pray."

"You poor dear boy. How I should like to ship you somewhere across the world, and keep you there, till she has run away with somebody else."

Hapless Immaculate! Having lunched with his relations, he dined at Notting Hill, bearing a bouquet of white moss roses for Lettice, some of which he was allowed to place in her hair, thinking

how well in her simple white dress her girlish grace and pure colouring harmonised with the pure white roses in their cool sheath of green.

On turning from this delightful task, Lester bent over a vase of crimson and yellow roses, inhaling their scent. "It is coals to Newcastle, to give you flowers, Lettice," he said. "You breathe flowers. Perhaps a secret sympathy attracts like to like."

She smiled with conscious power and secret amusement. Lovelace had given her the roses.

Then they dined with the usual discomfort peculiar to that house, and Lettice resigned herself to a dull evening at home with her future husband.

"You were very good about the other night," she said, when they were sitting apart together in the last sunbeams, while Mrs. Marshall discreetly dozed on the sofa. Major Marshall was in his study, and Arthur dining out. She spoke almost tenderly; Lester was touched. "I felt so sure that you had good cause for changing your mind," he replied, intending no sarcasm.

"Poor Charl—Mr. Lovelace, how all this

jealousy would amuse and flatter him!" Lettice said.

"He shall enjoy the flattery no longer," he exclaimed with a subdued fierceness that frightened her. "Do you know, Lettice, that gossip links his name with yours?"

"You make so much of things. And you are so cross and unkind to-night," she pouted. "And after I have been so nice to you, and said I was sorry!'

The Immaculate had turned away, he was looking thoughtfully out of window. "Thanks, dearest," he replied, "so that is at an end. Now I am going to speak to you very seriously," he said later, after a very solemn pause of apparent reflection.

"I knew you were going to worry me to-night, the moment I saw your grave face. You are getting tired of me, Vivian, and you want to quarrel and part us—just like a man—so selfish!"

Tears rose and streamed over her face, but quite becomingly.

"This is unjust," he returned, with affected indifference, "I seek no quarrel, dearest. I

always was, and always will be, true to you."

"Then why are you so cross and hard?" she sobbed.

Come now, "let us have done with misunderstandings and be at peace, Letty, dear. As your future husband, I have rights; those rights I mean to insist upon."

"Oh!" returned poor little Lettice, awed by his cool manner and devoured by vague terror, "You frighten me so—you are so much cleverer, stronger, and older——"

"—Dearest, I only wish to protect and cherish you," he said, gently. "Those are the rights I insist upon; sacred, precious rights, Lettice, believe me."

These words were not without effect; she was both abashed and comforted by them, and looked up at him with a smile of confidence and real affection shining through her tears, which, of course, had to be kissed away.

"I don't know how you came to choose me, Vivian," she murmured humbly, after these interesting rites.

"But I *have* chosen you; and you have accepted

me. So all we have now to do is to consider our duty to each other."

"Duty! oh! Vif! you speak so like a sermon," she said, looking so charming and so pitiful, that he could not help kissing the fragile hand he held in his.

"Supposing you were my wife now, don't you think we should get on better?" he asked.

"No; I don't want to be married yet."

"Let us try the experiment of marrying, at all events. Say this day month, Lettice."

"Oh! I can say nothing; Mamma must manage that," she replied, appearing to yield in a cloud of blushes, but secretly convinced that Mamma would soon put a stop to such nonsense as that.

"You shall never regret it, Letty dear," he said with earnest tenderness, after another caress.

"To think that I should go so near to loving a man!" Lettice was musing, as they sat hand in hand, in the silence that followed.

At this interesting moment the door opened, and Mrs. Cecil Langton came in. Mrs. Marshall awoke and exclaimed at the darkness; the lovers

moved apart; Vivian obeyed an injunction to ring the bell. Letty went to the piano and began strumming, regretting her too great lenity towards her lover. "It will never do to be in love with one's husband," she mused.

Then Lester drew a chair to Mrs. Marshall's side and told her of Lettice's consent to his proposal. Mrs. Marshall objected, and talked of trousseaux, invitations and guests; but Lester pleaded so earnestly that she might be married anyhow, even in sackcloth, so long as she was married quickly, that Mrs. Marshall gave in, a happy inspiration showing this to be a brave way out of trousseau difficulties.

Tea and lights followed; Mrs. Cecil Langton was pouring grievances into her mother's ear, and Lettice pouring out tea, when a man entered, unannounced; it was Mr. Lovelace. Mrs. Marshall shivered; Lettice was delighted; to see these two men before her and play them off one against the other was just what she had been longing for. "Now there will be some fun," she thought.

Lovelace took a seat by the tea-maker with an air that made the Immaculate's blood boil. The

new-comer lounged at his ease in a deep chair, yawned, and addressed his remarks wholly to Lettice, who had plenty of smiles for him, and thought it a good opportunity to put Lester on the rack.

The latter glared savagely at his rival, and then, turning his back on him, addressed his conversation to his hostess, who was too frightened to listen, while the Immaculate was wholly preoccupied in remembering that he had forgotten to insist upon those pre-conjugal rights of which he had spoken, Lettice's unwonted sweetness having beguiled him from the subject. He felt all the time through the back of his head the glances and mutual smiles passing between Lettice and Lovelace. "What jolly tea you make!" was one of this amiable gentleman's harmless remarks, to which the tone and the look gave weight.

Mr. Charles Lovelace was used to confine his admiration to the objects of other people's; the fact of a woman's being admired by another man, were she dull as a wet day and ugly as a railway station, was enough to make him desire her affections. This was the secret of his five years' philandering

with Georgie Langton. Georgie attracted a continual stream of worshippers; no sooner did one try to bring things to a climax than Mr. Lovelace appeared with an intimation that the property was booked. The adorer driven away, Mr. Lovelace's affection cooled, till a new one appeared, when the old game was played again.

Lettice shared this charming weakness. Having heard of Lovelace as the lawful spoil of Georgie, she at once felt the necessity of winning him. So this pretty pair were pitted against each other in a sort of duel, each bent on capturing the heart of the other for the refined amusement of throwing it away. The presence of Lester stimulated the good Lovelace to renewed ardour, while a rumour that Lovelace was now formally engaged to Georgie had the same effect on Lettice.

The Immaculate affected not to observe Lovelace, when that amiable person was warbling duets with Lettice, and bending, being short-sighted, over the golden head in which Lester had just placed the moss-rose, in a way that made the latter green with

indignation. But in truth he could see and feel nothing but those warblers, and the sight of Lettice's sweet face raised to the ardent glances of Lovelace at last became so intolerable that he left the room and went out into the smoky strip of back garden, where a feline concert was going on, to calm his emotions and bring himself to think gently of Lettice. How sweet she had been in those few twilight moments! Was that, too, only a piece of coquetry?

When he returned, Lovelace had taken his leave, highly gratified with his evening's amusement. Mrs. Marshall was gone to bed with some slight ailment, Mrs. Cecil Langton again in the nursery; Lettice was alone, half triumphant, half frightened, and ostensibly engrossed in needlework.

"Well, Vif!" she said airily, "You soon got tired of my society."

He looked grimly upon her half saucy, half shrinking and wholly charming face, as he replied, "On the contrary, I had too little of it to be tired."

"You were horribly rude to poor Mr. Lovelace," she pouted.

"I felt rude. Had I remained in sight of that conceited and insufferable ass, I should have had to smash him to atoms."

She laughed a delicious laugh of amused triumph.

"When you promised to be my wife just now," continued Lester with an intent gaze, that she attributed to admiration, "I almost thought that you loved me."

"Really?" responded Lettice with a pretty curl of her lip.

"But when I saw you with that—that—unspeakable ass," he went on with gathering indignation, "nothing could keep me from thinking that your feeling for him at least *appeared* similar to your feeling for me."

"You suggest that I care for him?" returned Lettice with sudden anger. "Ah! perhaps you feel that he is more fitted to win hearts than *some* people."

"If I, who have every reason to believe the contrary," here his gaze became so intense that Lettice shrank under it, "cannot refrain from unjust suspicions—what wonder that people couple your names?"

"Who cares if they do?" she retorted, watch-her victim's writhings with complacency.

"I care. Therefore I insist upon your giving up his acquaintance."

"Do you insist upon anything else?" she asked, with a teasing smile, and a delightful consciousness of power.

"I insist upon your dropping Mrs. Fitzwilliam."

"And you think I am so simple as to give in to your insistings? Up in the clouds as usual, Vif. What do you know of women?"

"All that I know of women depends on you," he replied, turning pale. "Women have great moral power over men, Lettice; a man's estimate of the sex depends on his wife; his own moral status on that."

"What dry stuff you talk to-night!" she returned, suppressing a yawn.

"Will you do this for me or will you not?" he asked.

"I will not."

"If you refuse me this one favour now, how will you learn to obey me as a wife?"

"Just as if I had the smallest intention of obeying you as a wife!"

"Yet you have promised to become my wife this day month—"

"—Indeed, I promised nothing of the kind. Silence doesn't always give consent."

"Won't you promise now?" in a pleading voice.

"Not I."

"My dear child, will you speak seriously?"

"I don't know that I will," she replied lightly, holding her work to one side to study its effect, and thinking how desperately in earnest her victim was. "If you don't like me, Vif, you can leave me."

"Do you mean that?" he asked in a stifled voice, "Are we really to part?"

"Just as you like. What do I care?"

"I cannot think that you love me, Letty," he replied, his large dark eyes luminous with emotion, his features full of pathos.

She longed to throw her arms round his neck and protest that she loved him with all her heart; but vanity and the coquette's wayward desire to play her fish as long as possible, restrained her.

"Everything I do offends you and sets you preaching; you expect me to be as dull and dreary as yourself," she complained, "What a pity you didn't fall in love with a prim girl like your paragon, Amy. *I* like fun and pleasure and a little quiet flirtation."

His cheek flushed. "We have made a mistake," he replied. "I see that it is not in my power to make you happy. But I will not make you miserable; you shall have your freedom, Lettice, if you wish it."

"Thanks. I always meant to take it," returned Lettice, drily.

"Must we part then?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

"If you like."

"Will you not—change a little—for my sake?"

"No; I *won't*. And I won't be teased any longer. If you don't like me you can leave me," she replied with sudden temper.

He was standing very stiffly before her, not far from the door; had he been farther from it their fates might have been different. As it was, he

bowed, turned and went, with a brief farewell that took her completely by surprise.

But when the door had closed upon him and she found herself alone in the dimly-lighted room, the full meaning of the scene flashed through her. "He is gone! Oh! Vif!" she cried, springing to her feet.

It was real love now, or at least as much of it as her weak and wayward heart was capable of.

CHAPTER XVII

"The fraud of man was ever so
Since summer first was leavy."

IT was long before the earliest time at which Lettice was accustomed to rise, this variable hour depending more on the prospect of occupation agreeable enough to woo her from her pillow, than on the state of the dial. Unable to rest, she rose and dressed with unusual care, in the secret hope that Lester, after passing a night of misery and despair, would rush distracted to the house and implore forgiveness. So she made herself as beautiful as a young angel, and looked as fresh as a rose, saying to herself over and over again, "He will come back—he will come back."

She waited at home all day, making four or five different and enchanting toilettes, and changing her mood from anger to tenderness, from tender-

ness to hope, and thence to anger again as many times. Presently, as the afternoon wore on, she took a sheet of paper and scribbled hastily,

"Dearest Vif,

"Come back to

"Your brokenhearted

"LETTY."

"Well, that ought to fetch him!" said her sister, coolly looking over her shoulder. Letty's pride and shame were blazoned in her face as she tore the note to atoms.

At last a letter came by special messenger. "I knew he would write or come!" she cried, with a flush of triumph, "I knew it." She began to consider how soon it would be prudent to forgive him before she opened the letter. It was a thick packet, but the thickness was made up of her photograph, a tress of her hair, and some half-dozen faded flowers, each bearing a date and inscription, "From her hair," "She gave me this in the garden," "Under the orange trees—moonlight." The sight of these petrified her, and she read with amazement:

"Dear Miss Marshall,

"That you should have told me to leave you is naturally most painful and distressing to me. But, as you so justly said, I could never, with my tastes and views, which I am now too old to change, make your life happy, or even endurable. I have the consolation of knowing that my disappointment will be the greatest relief to you and the only foundation for your future happiness, which I sincerely hope will be very great. I trust that you will continue to regard me as a friend, and will give me the privilege of rendering you any service in my power. Shall I return the letters you did me the honour to write, or shall I destroy them?

"With every good wish for your happiness,

"I remain, dear Miss Marshall,

"Very truly yours,

"VIVIAN LESTER."

Mortal chill fell upon Lettice as she read; all was over, she felt; never, never would she care for anything again. Poor crushed roseleaf!

The next day, when Lettice and her sister were walking in Kensington Gardens, who should

approach them but Mr. Lovelace. It was a purely accidental, and therefore doubly charming, meeting, at which Letty flushed deliciously, while Lovelace looked as only Lovelaces can. Soon after he joined them, Mrs. Langton and her child became conveniently invisible.

Poor Mr. Lovelace had ever had a pious horror of domestic bliss. But he could not bear the thought of losing Georgie, though the horrors of a purely domestic life were now pressing close upon him, and the iron of prospective matrimony entering his soul. Georgie now represented duty instead of delight to him. In this mood he met Lettice, who had never looked more lovely, he thought. The slight pallor caused by her trouble heightened the delicacy of her beauty; she was tremulous, wistful, yearning for sympathy; she did not attempt to conceal the pleasure she found in his society; her heart was sore, her wounded vanity needed balm. She had not yet told her parents of the breach with Vivian; Carrie had laughed at her fears, not having seen Lester's final letter. Lettice felt that she must be pitied or die. Lovelace saw that something was wrong; he

listened to vague hints of tyranny; he was ready to protect her against the whole world. Letty was misunderstood and unhappy. She was told that *somebody* understood her; she burst into tears. His vanity and pity were both touched.

"Letty," he murmured tenderly, "I have always adored you."

Now Letty's vanity was touched; her self-pity overflowed in fresh tears. "Don't tempt me," she whispered.

He looked volumes, but said nothing for a few moments, while he wondered what were her expectations and mused upon Mrs. Fitzwilliam's hints of a rich and doting godmother. "Marry *me*, Letty," he said softly at last, when they paused beneath an elm.

She bent her eyes to the ground. What a vengeance this would be on that hard-hearted Vivian! Her breath came quickly; the hand Lovelace had taken fluttered like a small bird in his. "Hush, I am engaged," she faltered.

"Engaged!" echoed Lovelace with an energy engendered by opposition, "And to whom? To

a tyrannical prig, who undervalues and misunderstands you."

"But you—you too are engaged."

"Dearest Letty, I *was*," he replied, impressively.

On the Tuesday before Georgie Langton's wedding-day, a small party, consisting of Louisa Stanley, the Immaculate, who was an old friend of Mr. Graham, Edward Graham himself, who may be remembered as Louisa's distant and silent adorer, and Amy Langton, drove to a secluded London church in the forenoon. Here Louisa and Mr. Graham were married very dismally. The Immaculate was always turning up as an old friend of somebody; on this occasion, Louisa's brother being on foreign service, he came in handy both as groomsman and to give the bride away. The grace and propriety with which he performed these functions may be imagined.

They were signing the register in the vestry, when Amy gave a faint shriek and dropped her pen.

"Come Amy," remonstrated the bridegroom; "you've no right to these weaknesses; it's not *your* show this time."

The Immaculate made no observation whatever; he stood with an absolutely unmoved countenance and heavenly demeanour, awaiting his turn to sign. Louisa peeped over Amy's shoulder and exclaimed in turn, when she saw what she had been too agitated to perceive when signing herself, namely, the signatures of the last couple married—

Charles Lovelace, 30, and Lettice Marshall, 21—parentage and circumstances correctly given.

Crimson and tremulous, Amy finished signing, and the Immaculate, advancing with his accustomed grace and a smile like the Heathen Chinee's, took the pen with the observation, "Their carriage drove off as we arrived," and wrote his name in his usual neat and legible hand.

"Friends of yours?" the clergyman asked; "Married by special license. The bride scarcely looked twenty-one, I thought."

"I must go home and break it to Georgie," Amy said in the church porch later to Louisa.

"Poor Georgie. In all seriousness I am grieved for the insult to your sister."

The bride and bridegroom drove away; Amy's heart sank; she was near tears.

"Courage!" said the Immaculate, drawing her hand within his arm, "Graham is a good fellow and Algerian winters will prolong her life."

"I know," she replied. But what shall *I* do without her? Then—Georgie——"

"I congratulate your sister on her escape, As for me, I was recommended to resign, or rather told to send in my papers, a week ago. I thought Lovelace was probably on promotion."

When Amy reached Angel Road, she found the girls at home and in the highest spirits; they came into the hall and asked her a thousand questions:—"How did it go off?" "Was Louisa very nervous?" "You look as if you had been to a funeral, Amy." "Only think! It makes her miserable even to look at weddings," laughed Georgie. "She is as white as a sheet; one would think she had been married herself. Why, Amy, you are not going to faint! Fetch some water, Lucy."

"No, I am not going to faint."

"Then you are going to be married yourself,"

cried Georgie triumphantly; "But hear my news first. Here is a telegram from Algy. He will be here in time for the wedding. Isn't it delicious? Think of old Algy! Do you suppose that he will have a great bushy beard, wear no waistcoats and eat with a clasp knife, and walk about in big boots and a flannel shirt? How will Charlie like him? Why, Amy, you don't seem glad!"

"Dear Georgie," she replied, "I have heard bad news. No; it does not concern Algy."

"Then it concerns me," cried Georgie, the brightness fading from her face. "It is Charlie!"

"He would never have made you happy."

"What do you mean?" Georgie cried, in a discordant voice.

"He married—Lettice—this morning."

"Oh!" Georgie shrank as if she had been struck, and turned pale as death.

"Mamma had set her heart upon it," she said, after a pause; "Thank you. Tell the others."

"Dear Georgie!" Amy said, caressing her.

"Look here, Amy," said Georgie, taking the water Lucy had brought, and drinking it with a

smile, "I drink to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace. Who gave the bride away? I would have done it with pleasure, and the bridegroom, too, or any other rubbish I was tired of." Then, in a shaky, hesitating voice, "Did they look *very* happy, Amy?"

"I didn't see them. Mr. Lester did. He thinks you had a lucky escape."

"Much obliged to the Immaculate. Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace!—the blushing bride! Will they send us cards and cake? Ought I to write and congratulate them? You see they are both such —*old* friends."

A few minutes later Mrs. Langton came in with a cheerful, "Well, Amy, how did it go off? Where *is* Georgie again? Does she think all those dresses will be ready by Thursday at this rate?"

CHAPTER XVIII

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

THE bright sweetness of September lay on the country; slopes dipping down to the river Dale showed a pale gleam of harvested fields; here and there a spot of vivid orange or gold glowed like a flame in dark thick foliage. Far away to the east, the strip of sea visible from Baron's Cleeve looked like a still cloud of azure air, the pale sky, stainless overhead, darkened into purply mist on the horizon. An exquisite hush had fallen on weary Nature; it was a time for quiet musings and peaceful dreams, a pensive time, grave not sad. The garden terraces at Baron's Cleeve glowed brighter than ever as if with a last supreme effort; myrtles were still in bloom, fruit hung rich in orchards and on walls, late roses exhaled the last sweetness of summer, a Virginia creeper twined among ivy

on the grey stone house had changed to fiery red in the last few days.

Here Amy Langton was snatching a brief holiday before the winter work. She was very tired; the romance of daring an unusual life in the teeth of opposition had evaporated with the novelty of it, leaving a barren stretch of grey, uninviting duty behind. Life seemed nothing but perpetual labour, all illusions and loveliness crushed beneath the grim monotony of work. Everybody experiences such moods at times.

Amy had now no family life, she never could have one; there were other, more congenial daughters in the home in which she had felt herself so superfluous. Sitting on the terrace that afternoon, she thought and thought of these things, while she wrote to Louisa one of those long feminine letters that sometimes astonish the male mind. She wrote on till shadows lengthened, sunlight softened, and swallows twittered in airy squadrons over the water in the valley below. Then she heard the sound of wheels on the gravel, Steven's whistle through the house, her brother's deep voice and his wife's clear laugh in the hall.

A moment later there was a quick, light step on the terrace, at which her eyes turned to fire, her face to crimson, the whole world from greyness to glory.

The Immaculate would have been more or less than human had he not known that his unexpected appearance had produced all that radiance and agitation in the face before him. But he only said, as he clasped the hand offered him, "I drove over with your brother to dine. They said I should find you here." And she only replied that she was glad, and that the afternoon was pleasant. Then he took a seat near her, bent towards her, his hands clasped lightly in front of him, and watched her with kindling eyes, while she folded her closely-written foreign sheets, put them in an envelope and addressed them.

"I need not ask to whom," he said, when the superscription was begun.

"Indeed, I hope you would not be so rude," she replied; "we could never again call you the Immaculate."

"Do I deserve it? Am I indeed such a prig?"

"I decline to gratify a morbid vanity by a denial. You need not look so pathetic about it."

"Can I help it when you are so severe? Dr. Amy," he added, after some happy, silent minutes, "do you remember our last holiday at Baron's Cleeve?"

"Quite well. Have you a foreign stamp?"

"Two pennies and a half-penny, if they will serve."

"Thank you; plenty of room."

"You would have nothing to say to me, then. Well! it had to be put up with. It was hard, for I always was attracted to you. Your friendship has been and is the most precious thing in my life; but—"

"—I am glad, so glad, and proud too. I always liked you, even when you scolded me most. Your errors are so respectable, so venerable—precious heirlooms from your forefathers, dear Mr. Lester."

Come, come, come; 'venerable errors'; you are too severe, dear prophetess."

"Hit back, then. Have your revenge." She

laughed; he looked grave, wistful, a little bewildered.

They were on the same terrace on which they had so often met on sunny afternoons, where she had thrown roses at him, where he had appealed to her to give up her profession. They remembered it all. She was sitting in the shadows of the fig-trellis, some late rose petals had fallen on the turf, a sunbeam gleamed through the trellis upon her hair.

"Dearest prophetess," the Immaculate said with a tremble in his beautiful velvet voice, and a still flame in his beautiful pansy eyes, "this friendship, this beautiful, precious friendship—is—on my part—something more. It is love."

She covered her face with her hands. He thought—or was it the effect of a quivering sunbeam through the fig-trellis?—still he thought there was something like a sob in the quick breath.

"No," she said, at last, "Not love, Vivian, never that, between us."

"Yes Amy, that, always that, dearest; nothing less. Take it, darling, take it and keep it for ever

and ever." As he spoke, he slid softly,—and, of course, with perfect grace—to one knee on the turf at her feet. Their faces were quite close, the beating of their hearts was audible to each. The Immaculate was really too beautiful for words. Surely none but a fiend *could* resist him. Was Dr. Langton a tigress? Was her heart made of cast iron or Portland stone? At this enchanting moment, these verses floated through her mind,

> "All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
> Are all but ministers of love
> And feed his sacred flame."

They carried her in spirit to a sunny morning in the Riviera; she heard the hum of bees in thyme and the soft wash of blue waves on the hidden shore. She choked down a rising sob, and murmured, "It is September. In January you *adored* Lettice Marshall. In August, only a month ago, she was your promised wife."

"Nay; that was—illusion—not love."

"This, too, is illusion," said the fiendish young female, austerely, "Ah! now, don't spoil our beautiful friendship, Vivian. What a tale I heard under the olives that evening, and what an awful

cold I had next day! 'Not only the most beautiful but the best of her sex.' I couldn't rise anywhere near to the level; couldn't enter into the raptures in the least. I was held a publican and sinner."

"What a—what a—*fool* I was!" muttered the Immaculate, using a quite unpresentable word, "Darling, listen——"

—"I am listening. I listened then. I listened in the cage in the House of Commons, and I heard all the fine things you said about men's levity and their light way of promising marriage."

"True. But I've eaten a peck of salt with you, dearest. I've studied your character thoroughly. Haven't you refused me already, years ago, on this very spot? But I must confess this. That old illusion didn't last. That box on the ear—and the dog's bite—you remember? Poor little Angela!—killed it. It was all struggle and duty after that."

"Oh! Oh! Our perfect knight, our Immaculate, telling such—such awful—lies!"

"Oh! Not lies! the illusion returned and returned, the charm of beauty and grace and

supposed love; but it always had to be wooed back. Forget it, dear. Try to love me a little; be my wife, be Angela's mother."

"It will not do, Vivian; we should not even agree in educating Angela. Dear, I am no fit wife for you, I could not devote myself. I cannot give up my profession. My interests would clash with yours. My profession——"

—"Ah! but love is better. Try to love me, my own prophetess. If devotion, if love can make happiness, mine must and will make you happy, dearest."

"Is happiness the best thing, or duty, Vivian?"

"Love is both. My life, my happiness, the child's—all is in your hands."

In this strain the Immaculate pleaded long and beautifully, and one cannot help thinking that it must have taken a heart of adamant or of a demon, to resist such ideal love-making from such an ideal lover. Yet this young savage,—to her lasting discredit, one thinks—accomplished this dreadful feat.

She had devoted her life, she said, to a serious study of one of the most noble arts and crafts;

she was bound to pursue it; her mother looked to her—after so much vexation and disappointment —for help. "Think," she added, "of the degraded, stunted, wasted lives of innumerable middle-class women, who cannot possibly marry, purely because there are not enough men to marry them all. Think of the immense difficulties and obstacles that a few women have surmounted in the task of opening up new lines of usefulness to these women and removing the stigma from female erudition and labour. Picture the great mass of hopeless, superfluous spinsters 'withering on the stalk.' Think of the complex tangle of misery and vice resulting from wretched marriages, from the union of men and women without one taste or aim in common. Dear Vivian, think of the wretched marriage from which *you* have just escaped, and consider if this is a time for women to snatch at personal happiness, when they have gone as far, suffered as much, and made others to suffer as much, as I have. I cannot, I must not, dare not, give it up, my friend. Choose another wife. You are young, you are —attractive. You need a different kind of wife."

Poor, dear Immaculate; he knew it was useless to say more; so he thought a great deal instead.

The terrace was quite in shadow before they left it, the distant sea a cloud of softest rose, over which flitted a crimson sail; the scent of fig leaves, roses and over-blown myrtle on the parapet mingled with mignonette and almond of clematis from below; the hushed air had a sparkle of coming frost in it; the purple-misted hill-tops touched a pale, translucent sky; all the west was crimson and gold. Robins sang their cheery good-night, grasshoppers chirped faintly, swallows clouded the flushed sky in twittering masses. The rejected and the rejector strolled amicably back to the house in the crimson glow.

CHAPTER XIX

"For Love in sequel works with Fate
To draw the veil from hidden worth."

LIFE is not long enough to chronicle all the Immaculate's virtues and excellencies; it is fatiguing to have to observe that he bore his refusal in the most perfect manner, dined with the family immediately after as if nothing had happened, made himself as agreeable to all members, including the schoolboys home for the holidays, as usual, and sang charmingly to Mrs. Langton's accompaniment; while the stony-hearted fiend who had repulsed him, instead of tearing her hair, smiting her breast, and wearing sackcloth in remorse, selected her favourite frock, dressed her hair with the greatest art of which she was capable, and wore a string of pearls round her neck. What devilry might be hidden under these tactics, no one knows. They were not wholly un-

noticed by the Immaculate, who probably drew his own conclusions.

"Have you any objection to my marrying your stepsister, Langton?" he casually asked his host that night over a cigar.

"Certainly not; nothing would give me greater pleasure. But you know Amy takes herself and her physic very seriously. She is going to save society by the practice of medicine. And she is a really sensible woman, and probably knows best what she and the rest of them are fit for, as I often tell her mother, who can't make her out. My wife backs her up through thick and thin, she goes solid for female emancipation; though, as Mrs. Langton rules despotically over everyone in this house, I don't know what she is to be emancipated from. But do you think Amy cares for you, Lester? She is simply immense about men."

"Your sister," the Immaculate replied, tranquilly, "has already done me the honour of refusing me twice. I hope I am not vain, Langton, but I can't help thinking these facts impressive," he added, with a smile of deadly meaning.

The pair seldom met after this idyllic episode. Once, in the course of a Parliamentry enquiry, by commission, into the condition of East-end needlewomen, there was a public meeting in connection with it, several ladies being on the platform, as well as the member for Dalesby and his uncle, Lord Loughborough. The well-known face and figure of Mrs. St. Luke, M.D., appeared there amongst those of younger medical women.

"I say, Vif," the uncle whispered to him, "these women do the thing deuced well; so quiet and business-like. But Mrs. St. Luke is a veteran speaker."

"After all, why should they not? Who has a cooler, clearer head than Aunt Evelyn?" the nephew replied.

Lady Evelyn was her brother's right hand; she coached him, prompted him, suggested things to him, was worth, he sometimes said—but not to her—ten secretaries. It was, "Evie, I want collieries got up," or "I want the whole history of Cyprus by to-morrow night." "Get me a prècis of Derby's administrations," or "Evie, just get up Irish land tenures," or "What the dickens am

I to say at this Conservative meeting?" "Let me have 'Peace with Honour' in five epigrams at once, my dear."

She never failed him; these things kept her young and preserved her beauty. Her ungrateful brother sometimes asked what women could want with the franchise while they had such powers and opportunities as these? Besides, he would add, to clinch the matter, he had no franchise; why should women want what was denied to peers of the realm? This dreadful man seldom met women upon platforms; but the question under present discussion almost excused their presence even to him and his fastidious nephew.

Presently Mrs. St. Luke whispered something to a young woman at her side, who rose and left the platform, returning shortly after with a bundle of papers. She was tall, she walked well, with an air of distinction, taking her publicity as a matter of course, without a grain of self-consciousness.

"Who is that young goddess?" Lord Loughborough whispered, and his nephew pencilled a name printed on the programme, Miss A.

Langton, M.D. The name was just then spoken by the Chairman, who called on her to read her report; upon which, still keeping her eyes on her papers, she stood up in her place and began without agitation or self-consciousness, the usual "Mr. Chairman, etc," read out her paper very calmly, and sat down again. At all the "Hear, hears!" groans, "Shames!" and cheers, she waited till the tumult subsided, and went steadily on. This little experience was very good for the Immaculate's morals.

"After all," his uncle said later, "the Queen beats the lot at public reading and speaking."

"And us, too," added the perfect knight.

The exchange of a bow and smile, and an effort by the Immaculate to find her cloaks and cabs, comprised the whole personal intercourse between these lovers; officially, the member for Dalesby had to question the accuracy and call for the verification of some of Miss Langton's facts, which was all done decently and in order.

Who could imagine that, when this tall young woman was worried and over-tired, oppressed by London fogs, depressed by the ills and sins

of poor humanity, she was in the habit of calling up the memory of a sunny terrace on a still September afternoon, scent of fig-leaves, myrtle, mignonette, and roses, sound of twittering swallows, robins' song and grasshoppers' chirp, and with them a velvety voice, passion-thrilled, dark eyes, love-lighted, and words such as are spoken once, forgotten never; or that the member for Dalesby, under similar circumstances, summoned the same scene to his reveries, substituting a woman's voice, clear and pure, but deepened with feeling, and dark spiritual blue eyes, lighted by holy fire, for his own. Something else filled his reveries,—a hand scarred by a dog's bite, the face of a tiny dark-eyed girl nestled beneath the intellectual face with sapphire eyes. Who could imagine that, after such reveries, earth to each seemed sweeter, heaven nearer than before?

It was in the short, befogged days of late November that Amy Langton dined one night at Angel Road to meet the Australian brother, Algernon, whose wealth had proved to be largely based upon imagination. They met seldom;

Amy was always immersed in business, Algernon's stay in England was only for a holiday. Julius was dining at home, too; the brothers and sister stayed chatting until midnight. Then Algernon and Amy drove away together, Julius being bound in another direction.

The foggy day had given place to a clear, starry night with a sharp frostbite in the air. It was pleasant to roll over the dry roads in the keen night, Algernon praising the Southern Cross and the brilliance of Australian skies, Amy vaunting Italian moonlight. But what is that sudden splendour in the north? An Aurora Borealis? No; for the leaping light is mingled with clouds of rolling smoke; the streets are red with it.

"It is a fire," the brother said, "somewhere by Cromwell Road. Amy, I *must* see that fire. You won't mind dropping me and driving on alone, will you?"

"Certainly not."

Algernon alighted and melted into the crowd, a brown-bearded, brown-faced, athletic Australian, good at need.

The streets were soon dark streams of

rushing humanity, with here and there a swifter central current of strong horses, tossing eager heads, with jingle of harness and rattle of engines, amid a galaxy of brazen helmets glittering in the fitful lustre. The Australian, following the stream, was soon borne on the human surge to the source of this sinister splendour, a mansion, two mansions, near Cromwell Road. The first was well alight before an engine arrived; it was practically gone, almost gutted, in half-an-hour; the houses on either side were burning. The lion-like roar of the flame was emphasised by cracking timber, crashing masonry, amid popping, like single shots, human cries, orders, the steady thud-thud of engines and hiss of rushing water. Engine after engine clattered up; a moving splendour of brazen helms flashed here, there and everywhere; from roof to pavement axes glittered in the flame, as this and that source of peril was hacked away; ladders shot up, the fire-escape did duty; buckets and hose rained till the streets ran red with flame-reflecting water, and the surging crowd was swept back by the streams directed upon them.

Sometimes a groan rolled heavily over the crowd, when inmates or firemen were seen in danger; then a cheer thundered up when the danger passed.

The fire was eating its savage way through Number Seven, the house next to Lord Loughborough's, that in which the fire began. The lower stairs were gone. Some women servants and children asleep on the first floor had been roused at the first cry of fire and taken out safely, but a boy of seven was missing. The fire-escape was planted against the house, a fireman climbed up and returned empty-handed.

"Let *me* go, Fireman. I *know* he is there," cried a young man in evening dress, pushing the man aside and springing up the ladder, which was now swathed in smoke. He disappeared through a third-floor window; several seconds elapsed, during which the burning second floor gave way with a crash, a volume of flame shot up above it, the outer wall yielded, and, after tottering a minute, crashed in, the fire escape with it, just as the young man re-appeared, carrying something white, and greeted by a loud roar from the

raging fire, in which a deep low groan from the crowd was swallowed.

The window at which the man appeared was next the house corner; the fire had not yet reached it, but was advancing with every second. The corner stood like a tottering tower by a chasm of raging fire, that leapt high above it and poured sparks and flaming brands upon it. The young man was out on the balcony in front of the window; he was seen to tie his burden—poor little distraught Harry, whom he found crouched in a corner, numb and idiotic with terror—to a sheet, which he let down, shouting for a mattress to break his fall. A mattress was held by many willing hands; the child was dropped and caught; then the young man fell back, half over the balcony and partly propped by the house wall.

"Jump," they shouted from below; but he neither moved nor answered; he had been struck by a piece of charred wood carried up by the fire-draught like a scrap of paper and dropped.

"A ladder! A rope! The fire-escape!" cried confused voices. The fire had licked up that

part of the balcony that was over the flames; the metal rails hung down, twisted like a wisp of straw.

"Throw a rope with a block," one of the brigade in command ordered. It was done; the block caught and ran down, but the man remained motionless and helpless. The fire crept nearer; the corner tottered.

"Will no one fetch him? Is he dead? Will the rope bear?" was heard in several voices. Hose were directed in many streams on the doomed corner, the crowd was scourged back by the hose in readiness for the expected crash, when, with a wild cry of "*With him or for him*," a tall young woman dashed through hose-streams, policemen and firemen, caught the rope, swarmed up it like a cat, and reached the tottering balcony in a few seconds. Snatching the rope up, she passed it round the man's body, bound it firmly, and tried to lift him over. He fell, helpless but not senseless, into her arms, just able to second her efforts by throwing his weight here and there; she got him over the balcony without a jerk; the rails gave and bent in the strain; flames leapt

upon them, quenched again and again by the water.

"Now let go of me," she said to the dazed, exhausted man, who obeyed, swung free with a cry of agony, then sank swooning, as she paid the rope out from her torn hands, the top rail escaping the strain, as she leant back against the wall, bracing her feet against the bottom rail. Many willing arms supported the mattress held to catch the injured man; the boom of a mighty cheer rolled round, when he was safely received and quickly borne off, just as a gust of flame parted the rope that lowered him and a volume of smoke whirled round the corner, concealing the young woman in its black heart. Silence of horror fell upon those below; a big, brown-bearded man who had been lending a useful hand, shouted in a loud hoarse voice, "Jump, Amy, jump, for the love of Heaven!"

Area spikes, hot and hissing from water, were under the mattress held for the other two, and which had been hurried away with the injured man upon it. The sheet that had lowered the child, black, wet, and scarcely discernible, was snatched

by firemen, held aloft and firmly supported, in time to catch the girl, who saw, when the smoke eddied away from her, that the man she had rescued was safely out of the way. Then she jumped, was caught on the edge of the sheet, bounded up, turned over in the air and fell, knocking a fireman down under her. By the time she struck the fireman in her fall, all behind her was one mass of flame, and the corner of the house gone. From the time the rope was thrown over the balcony rail to the man's complete rescue, five minutes; to Amy's fall, seven.

Both were burnt and bruised, but poor brave Bayard had a broken leg as well; the blow on his head had only stunned him. Julius helped to set the limb and waged a life-long war with his sister upon the causes that left a slight lameness, so beautifully managed by the Immaculate that it was converted into a grace, lending new distinction to his carriage. Julius managed his sister's sprained ankle and serious burns better. The lovers wrote to, and heard of, each other, but did not meet until both had recovered.

"You *must* marry me now, dearest," the

Immaculate said on that august occasion. "I am your Frankenstein. You gave me life; I demand happiness."

"But honour and duty come first. I cannot give up my calling. As for love—"

"My brave, beautiful prophetess, when I saw your face through the flames—'An angel yet—yet a woman—'" Can we blame our proven, perfect knight if his voice failed him here and tears sprang unbidden?—"Amy, I am not the hide-bound, prejudiced ass I was. Love has taught me better, a woman's love, a woman's heroism. Dear, I will never hinder you; only give me the privilege of helping."

"Oh! but I am not the wife you need—not the helpmate," she faltered.

"Just the wife, no other. As for obedience? Why not obey each other?"

"My own dear Bayard," she murmured humbly, as she glided into his tenderly passionate embrace; "my peerless, perfect knight!"

If the marriage proved a happy one; if the Immaculate became a statesman, lawyer or scribbler of renown; if his virtues, cleared and

settled by the ferment of youth, mellowed with years; if he and Amy became less dead-sure of their own opinions, and more tolerant of other people's; of the manner in which he helped her to reconcile her wifely and professional duties, and to further the improvement of her sex; no authentic record is as yet discoverable.

But it is certain that Amy's husband never forgot the cry that rang through the roaring flames surrounding him of;—

"With him or for him!"

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